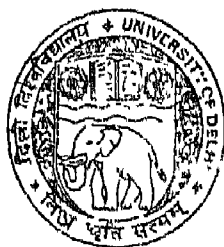


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THE ORIGINS OF
AMERICAN CRITICAL
THOUGHT
1810-1835

BY

WILLIAM CHARVAT

A PERPETUA BOOK 

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TO
MY MOTHER

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

IT IS MY HOPE that this study does credit to the teaching of Professor Arthur Hobson Quinn, whose work in American literature has been an inspiration to so many students in that field.

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Thanks is due Dodd, Mead and Company for permission to use extracts from I. W. Riley's *American Philosophy: The Early Schools*.

W. C.

December, 1935

New York City

EXPLANATION OF FOOTNOTES

Footnotes referring to magazines (e.g., 1817. 4. 219) indicate year, volume, and page, in that order. When a roman numeral appears (e.g., 1812. V. 12. 109) it indicates the series.

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to critical reasoning. Judged on this basis, the quarterlies supply the best materials, the monthlies the next best. The weeklies and the newspapers, for the most part, did not devote sufficient space to individual criticisms to say anything of importance.

It follows that most of the articles are anonymous. This, indeed, is a significant fact concerning judicial criticism: that its authority is that of a class or an organization, rather than of an individual. The reader of criticism in those days did not care to know what an individual thought of a book; he wanted the book to be tested by the principles of a journal with which he was familiar. He leaned upon established principle, not upon someone's opinion. But that anonymity was occasionally broken, either because a critic went beyond the principles of his journal, or because he achieved such excellence that it was thought worth while to collect his articles and reprint them separately. There is, then, a body of criticism by individuals to be considered, but it is not the kind of criticism that appears today in book form. Usually, it has the weight of society behind it, either because it first appeared anonymously in a critical journal, or because it was delivered as a public lecture. Of the first variety is the collected work of such critics as W. H. Prescott, A. H. Everett, and Robert Walsh; of the second are the addresses of Bryant, Channing, and various clergymen. The biographies, memoirs, and letters of these men sometimes help to fill out the materials, and the prefaces of various works offer further criticism.

* * * * *

The quarter century, 1810-1835, has a unity of its own. Within its limits, Bryant, Dana, Percival, Halleck, and Drake produced their most important poetry; Cooper, Irving, and Paulding their best fiction; Payne, Barker, and Bird their best plays. In England it embraced the best work of Byron, Coleridge, Keats, Moore, Shelley, Southey, and (except for the *Lyrical Ballads*) Wordsworth in poetry; of Austen, Peacock, and Scott in the novel; of Hazlitt, Lamb, Landor in the

essay. Thus, it was the period when England produced its chief romantic poetry and essays. In America, however, it was only the period of the incubation of romanticism. The end of it marks the beginning of the best work of Emerson, Hawthorne and Poe in fiction, Longfellow, and Whittier.

As a national contrast this may suggest (what has often been said) that American romanticism was a later development of English romanticism. Of course this is not true, for our romantics have no real prototypes in English literature of the preceding period. But the contrast throws light on an important fact. Much of the best American criticism of our period concerned the English romantics. It was judicial, not appreciative criticism. The result was that the elements of English romanticism not acceptable to the American temperament were winnowed out. Byron was banished before the period closed; Keats and Shelley were neglected; Wordsworth and Coleridge were accepted with reservations; Hazlitt was attacked; Scott was welcomed. In the American romantic period up to 1860, there was little of the influence of Shelley and Keats in the mature work of our best poets; there was some of Wordsworth and Coleridge in our transcendentalists; there was a good deal of Scott in our minor novelists. This does not mean necessarily that our critics had any considerable effect on the development of romanticism; on the contrary, they did little constructive work for our artists. It does mean that they were subject to many of the principles and ideals which molded the work of American romantics.

The literary character of the preceding quarter century was quite different, but the lines of continuity are interesting.² In the first place, it fought out the questions of politics and economics which took its mind from its own literary pursuits, and left our period free to develop its arts. The poetry of the earlier period is predominantly political in tone. The best minds of the time—Jefferson, Hamilton, and

² For information on its criticism, I am indebted to H. L. Flewelling's dissertation, *Critical Opinion in American Periodicals, 1780-1812*.

J. Q. Adams³—were devoted to affairs of state. Most of the poets were aligned with either the Federalists or the Republicans, and, excepting the verse of R. T. Paine, the Della Cruscans, and Francis Hopkinson, the gleams of pure art in their works were few. The Hartford Wits, who had begun as Goldsmiths and Denhams, became defenders of the Federalism and religious orthodoxy which prevailed throughout the next period.⁴ Philip Freneau, the period's brightest hope in poetry, spent his energies in the battle for republicanism,⁵ and his valuable contributions to dictional technique in poetry were ignored by the critics in their disgust with his politics. Even in the following period he was neglected by the historians of American verse, so long did the prejudice against "infidelity" linger. The politics of the time left a heritage of bias to our period; but it also left our critics free to use political and religious orthodoxy as a principle rather than as a weapon.

In general, Dr. Flewelling tells us, criticism in the period up to 1800 showed interest in past writers rather than in contemporaries, was not hostile to England, and echoed British criticism. In the following decade, Cowper was preferred to Pope, little interest was shown in Wordsworth, a reaction set in against Franklin and Barlow, and Noah Webster was attacked for giving academic recognition to Americanisms in speech. Literary criticism had no particular character except in Brockden Brown's and Dennie's magazines and in the *Monthly Anthology*.

The distinguishing characteristic of our period is the fact that its criticism was written by active men of the world—lawyers, legislators, ministers, physicians, and teachers. The records of projected academies of arts and sciences in the early nineteenth century offer abundant evidence of paternalism in the arts. The most ambitious of these was proposed in

³ Adams' literary activities are interesting. He wrote verse, including sonnets, translated French and Latin poetry, taught rhetoric at Harvard, was interested in the theatre, and wrote essays on Shakespeare. See his *Diary*, edited by Charles Francis Adams, 1874.

⁴ See V. L. Parrington: *The Connecticut Wits*, N.Y. 1926.

⁵ See H. H. Clark: *The Poems of Freneau*, N.Y. 1929.

1820.⁶ The officers included a president (John Quincy Adams), two judges, a doctor, and a minister, and of the Counsellors only Washington Irving and Joseph Hopkinson are remembered today for their literary accomplishments. Edward Everett helped kill the plan by attacking it in the *North American Review*, but one of his remarks reveals something of the nature of patrician culture: "The printed list of members comprises no small proportion of the respectability of our country. Great value would be attached to the opinion of almost any individual upon it, upon any subject on which it should be expressed."⁷

In no other period in American history has our culture been so completely and directly dominated by the professional classes; concomitantly, in no other period has the economically dominant class exhibited such an interest in the arts. This may be explained in part by the fact that the arts were not yet receiving sufficient public support to maintain native artists, due to such factors as illiteracy, preoccupation with material things in a pioneer country, and the lack of an international copyright law. It is safe to say that not more than half a dozen men of letters of that period devoted their lives exclusively to literature, and that none made their living at it. But there were also positive factors. Materialism and the economic pressure of industrialized society had not yet divorced career and culture. The privileged classes alone could afford the necessary higher education. Moreover, they had achieved a sort of homogeneity of outlook through the rise of the Federalist party and the fear of popular outbreaks. They were, therefore, concerned with the need for control of society.

The predominance of lawyers and ministers in the critical world explains in part two major characteristics of the criticism of the period: its judicial and its moral tone. Out of forty of the more important critics of the day, twenty had

⁶ See A. W. Read "The Membership in Proposed American Academies," *American Literature*, 1935 7. 145

⁷ *North American Review*, 1822. 14. 355

been trained for the law and eight had been members of Congress or a legislature. Selecting from these forty the ten most important critics and editors of the period—George Bancroft, W. C. Bryant, E. T. Channing, W. E. Channing, R. H. Dana, Sr., Joseph Dennie, A. H. Everett, W. H. Prescott, Robert Sands, and Robert Walsh—one discovers that all except W. E. Channing and Prescott were trained for the law, and that the latter was kept out of it only by his health. While it does not necessarily follow that a lawyer will pursue the judicial method in his judgment of literature, it is altogether likely that the essentially social character of his profession will encourage a tendency to think of life in terms of individual and group relations and of the laws which must inevitably govern those relations. A study of the criticism of the period supports the supposition, if not the causal relation.

Again, the moral tone of criticism must have been due in part to the number of clergymen who reviewed books. Of the group of forty critics, eighteen were or had been ministers, and several others were professors of divinity in the colleges. Moreover, all the critics of that day had been trained in religion and morals in their college courses. Religion and law together, therefore, served to create a social pattern of thought in criticism which brooked no assaults upon the political and moral order of the day. It follows that criticism was preoccupied with the social implications of literature, and that questions of art and technique were too often neglected.

It follows also that criticism reflected the political and economic bias of its writers. But the period was truly transitional in that it embraced the decline of open class war and saw the beginnings of a social enthusiasm which reached its height in the 'fifties. Within the quarter century, as industry and the frontier offered increasing opportunity to people of all classes, one observes the gradual disappearance of the class hostility which followed upon the French Revolution, and the development of faith in the safety of democracy.

II

THE BASIC CRITICAL PRINCIPLES OF THE PERIOD

IT IS DANGEROUS to generalize concerning a period even if it is only twenty-five years long, for exceptions are likely to prove important and disconcerting. But history cannot be written in terms of particular instances. Certain common denominators in critical thinking may be discerned as fairly constant throughout the period. Some of them changed or disappeared when romanticism came to dominate the times, but others have remained typically American, and have been basic in the main current of American criticism.

1.

The first of these is *the critic's conception of his function: He thought of himself as the watchdog of society.*

This attitude was modified as time went on, and a few of the romantics never held it. But by and large, the critical review felt it a duty to repress any writer who tended to disrupt the political, economic, and moral *status quo*. Its attitude was paternal; it thought of the public as a child who had to be educated along the proper lines and shielded from erroneous ideas. The *Portfolio*, for instance, commenting on the dangerous Thomas Paine, said, "In promoting the refinement of a people, the formation and diffusion of a correct taste constitute the step next in importance to the establishment and propagation of sound morals."¹ Irving remarked in the *Analectic* that criticism in this country is important because of the crude state of native talent and the immaturity of public taste,² and a critic in the same magazine said later that it is important to watch the American press "to keep

¹ 1815 IV 6. 489

² 1813 1. 249

the springs by which the great stream of public opinion is fed, as pure as possible, and to discourage the circulation of books whose objects are unfavorable to the political and moral interests of society."³ The most outspoken of the journals was the *American Quarterly Review*, which continued to fear for public morals as late as 1836. In 1830, commenting on the great popularity of novels, it observed that they should be narrowly watched by the periodical press principally for morals but also for style, and that it was the business of the critic to expose defects.

Such of [the novels] in particular as become popular ought to have their defects as compositions, whether they consist in insipidity or feebleness, in inaccuracy or inelegance, in exhibitions of ignorance or offenses against good taste, pointed out with an unsparing hand, so as to counteract, as far as possible, the evils which their extensive circulation may enable them to effect.⁴

One of its more reactionary reviewers, Dr. McHenry, felt that even the quarterly reviewers were no longer to be trusted because they were accepting the Lake Poets. He said that in the days of Addison and Johnson "criticism was written by men qualified to direct public taste."⁵ Two years later, an indignant reviewer of Hazlitt said that writers were undermining public respect for the sacredness of property, and that the quarterlies, appealing as they do to the educated and higher classes, must exercise through them a control over popular excesses, and guide the popular will,—in short, "act as a higher tribunal."⁶

The magazines of other cities were tactful enough to act on the principle without expressing it. The *North American Review* was somewhat less magisterial than these Philadelphia periodicals. At least two of its critics, Willard Phillips and R. H. Dana, disavowed any such attitude, and declared themselves in favor of a criticism which took the author's point of view. But by 1820 this liberal spirit had died, and the more

³ 1818. 12. 452

⁶ 1834. 15. 456

⁴ 1830. 8. 314

⁵ 1836. 20. 267

representative W. H. Prescott and A. H. Everett were legislating as busily as Robert Walsh was in Philadelphia. Generally, however, the more liberal magazines claimed to represent rather than to lead. The *New York Review and Athenæum Magazine* remarked on the fact that "the principle aims of criticism in the journals which come to us from abroad appear to be to anticipate and to modify general opinion," and added that critics should be "representatives of the reading community" and state majority and minority opinions.⁷ The conservative quarterly critics were more conscious of the gap between the class they represented and the lower classes to whom the weeklies appealed, and it is obvious that the importance which they attributed to their work was partly the result of fears of political disorders among the rising lower classes whose numbers and power constituted a threat to the safety of property which Hamilton and the Federalists had fought so hard to establish. It is quite likely that the fears of the *American Quarterly Review* were aroused by the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828, and this circumstance leads to the consideration of the second principle of American criticism in this period:

2. LITERATURE MUST NOT CONDONE REBELLION OF ANY KIND
AGAINST THE EXISTING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ORDER

It is to be noted, first of all, that almost all of the critics and critical periodicals were allied with the Federalist party, and that after that party broke up they continued to adhere to its economic doctrines. The Federalists represented the propertied class, the class which, in those days, dominated American culture. The form of our political society had been established by the Constitutional Convention, which had brought forth a document masterly in its devices for protecting the propertied few against the propertyless many. The announced task of many of the critics was to preserve that social order, and it was implied in the criticisms of the rest of them. In the early years of the century there was reason to fear for the

⁷ 1825. I. 39

stability of Federalist institutions because of the agitation inspired by the French Revolution, and it was then that the animosity between the classes was most bitter. The *Portfolio* was founded by Dennie in a spirit of antagonism to the mob, and in its prospectus he said, "We will not strive to please the populace at the expense of their quiet by infusing into every ill-balanced and weak mind a jealousy of rulers, a love of innovation, an impatience of salutary restraint." Oberholzer quotes him as saying, "For more than fifteen years we have published in periodical pages our sentiments in complete defiance of the choice or dictation of the many," and toward the end of his career the patrician note came out even stronger in his declaration that he had "aimed to serve only the most illustrious descriptions of American society—the liberal, the ladies, the lawyers, the clergy, and all the gentlemen and cavaliers of Columbia."⁸

The result of the scare was that every radical writer was attacked. In 1802, the *New England Quarterly*, in an article called "The Falsity of the New Fangled Philosophy," said that "so many moral paradoxes and licentious opinions have been published in the world since Rousseau sought distinction by inventing and ingeniously defending absurd doctrines that one every day meets with new fangled morality recommended by the graces of literature and decorated with the charms of composition," and then proceeded to attack Godwin for saying that men are equal and perfectible.⁹

Other magazines kept up a steady bombardment of Paine, Godwin, Freneau, and Rousseau, which decreased but did not stop within the period, even though, as W. E. Channing pointed out, no country in which everybody is struggling for property is in danger of revolution.¹⁰ As time went on and the danger of revolution passed, the journals said less about the matter, but kept a sharp lookout for dangerous authors and rarely failed to attack the idea of human "perfectibility"

⁸ *Literary History of Philadelphia*, Phil., 1906, p. 183

⁹ 1802. I. 95

¹⁰ "The Present Age," 1841, *Works*, Boston, 1875, p. 167

when a writer referred to it. In Philadelphia, Robert Walsh promised, in the prospectus for his *American Review of History and Politics* (1811) that he would propagate "sound political doctrines." The *Portfolio* attacked Rousseau,¹¹ sneered at Godwin,¹² praised Boudinot's *Age of Revelation* (which was an answer to Paine),¹³ and deplored the fact that Schiller did not punish his "Robbers" as they should be punished "for the sake of our lives and property."¹⁴ The *Analectic* laughed at Madame de Staël for predicting that the Revolution would hasten the progress of human perfection,¹⁵ and attacked Hazlitt and Godwin for their radical idealism.¹⁶ The *American Quarterly Review* contemplated with alarm the anti-social character of Bulwer-Lytton's *Paul Clifford*, and spoke of the "depredations on private property" which followed upon the publication of Schiller's *The Robbers* in Germany, and the *Beggar's Opera* in England.¹⁷

In spite of the fact that the *North American Review* was, according to William Tudor, established to counteract the reaction which followed the French Revolution "when sound thinkers fell back on English tradition for safety,"¹⁸ its critics were, with one exception, suspicious of social and economic reform. The exception was Willard Phillips, who said of Godwin¹⁹ that his social principles were extreme but that the agitation which he and his class produced was a good thing; that radical change is necessary; and that fault-finding brings about investigation. But Phillips was a voice crying in the wilderness, for other *North American Review* critics attacked Madame de Staël,²⁰ Rousseau,²¹ and Schiller.²² The *Christian Spectator* in New Haven praised "our bards" for having a decent regard for civil and religious institutions.²³ This same organ of trinitarianism printed an article called "The Moral

¹¹ 1810. III. 4 303

¹² 1820 V 9 265

¹³ 1813 2. 177

¹⁷ 1830. 8. 103

¹⁹ 1818 7. 95

²¹ 1822 15 1

²³ 1822. 4. 644

¹² 1818 V 6 170

¹⁴ 1811 6 183

¹⁶ 1818 12 201

¹⁸ *Miscellanes*, Boston, 1821, p. 52

²⁰ 1820 11. 124

²² 1823 16. 397

Influences of Manufactures"²⁴ in which it declared that industrialism was desirable because it brought together large groups of workers who were easy for ministers to get at, pointing out that Lowell, Massachusetts, had two thousand evangelists. The writer added that although industrialism is a wonderful thing, it is not good to employ children under ten years of age.

Not until the unitarians took up the cause of reform did the critics see that change did not necessarily mean a threat to the property of the privileged class, nor that a concern for the condition of the masses meant social leveling. The reformers for the most part accepted the principles upon which the Constitution was founded. It is true that they bemoaned the materialism which the Industrial Revolution had engendered, but they felt that the cure lay in men's souls rather than in economic reform. Channing, for instance, preached to workmen about self-culture, saying, "I have all along gone on the principle that a man has within him capacities of growth which deserve and will reward intense, unrelaxing toil. . . . I am aware that this view is far from universal. The common notion has been that the mass of the people need no other culture than is necessary to fit them for their various trades";²⁵ and yet he could say, "the very privation of civil government is in effect a chain; for by withholding protection from property, it virtually shackles the arm of industry, and forbids exertion for the melioration of his lot." It is obvious that political conservatives had nothing to fear even from the radical clergy.

It is to be noticed that many of the critics thought of the fate of civil and religious institutions as interdependent. Indeed, the Protestant Church was the most powerful ally that the Federalist party could claim, for it had identified the fight against political radicalism with that against infidelity. That was to be expected in New England, at least, for the theocracy of the seventeenth century supplied ample prece-

²⁴ 1832, 4 375. At this period the magazine added *Quarterly* to its title.

²⁵ "Self-Culture," 1838, *op. cit.*, p. 19

dent. But the reverse was also true: the Federalists made use of religion by putting on all radicals the stigma of infidelity. J. K. Paulding, in 1822, made the observation that Paine's works could not be bought by anyone in England who claimed to be respectable, but that other deists and religious skeptics, such as Bolingbroke, Hume, and Gibbon, were still read; therefore, Paine was unpopular not as a deist but as an advocate of the Rights of Man.²⁰ And therein lies a difference between England and America in that period: Americans did not think of Gibbon, Bolingbroke, and Hume as proper reading for respectable people. Their anxiety concerning religious institutions was even deeper than their fears for the political order, for there were more threats to it. So general was the insistence on religious and moral orthodoxy that it may be called a third critical principle of the period:

3. LITERATURE MUST NOT CONTAIN ANYTHING DEROGATORY,
IMPLICITLY OR EXPLICITLY, TO RELIGIOUS IDEALS
AND MORAL STANDARDS

To those who are familiar only with the more blatant expressions of early nineteenth-century moralism, this principle might seem almost too obvious to be mentioned. In fact, considered from that angle, it is hardly a principle at all, but rather a vague, pervading attitude, altogether stultifying and unadmirable, the chief enemy to the growth of culture and the development of art. It was that, in part. There was no lack of criticism of the kind which condemns a novelist for not letting the virtuous suitor win the maiden, or a biographer for telling the world that Washington drank. But that sort of opinion has been common since the Middle Ages, and it has no significance in our period except perhaps that there was a little more of it than in some other periods.

Nor is it particularly important that the critics almost without exception attacked Byron's private life, or objected to some of the "coldly voluptuous" verse of Thomas Moore. In the last analysis, it cannot be shown that the literary fate of

²⁰ *Sketch of Old England by a New England Man*, New York, 1822, I, 79

any of the Romantics was affected by their morals. Keats and Shelley were ignored; Byron and Wordsworth were accepted. On the score of moral effect, no conclusion can be drawn from that juxtaposition. One can only say that about the year 1830 American critics sighed with relief that the Byronic school was dead and that they need no more be confused by poetry that was at once charming and not quite pure. It is demonstrable that the course of the novel was affected by moral considerations; but if Fielding was universally condemned for his morals, that did not prevent Paulding from taking lessons from him; and if Sterne was reproached on the same grounds, the readers of our period could still enjoy some of his methods in the work of Irving.

The subject has vitality only if we think of religion as a force for discipline, and of the moral consideration as a principle of life. The two are almost inseparable, but the first may be exemplified by a critic's remark on the morality of Schiller's *The Robbers*. Characters in German dramas, he says, are always doing abominable things under the best of motives. It does not matter why a robber robs; the action must be considered evidence of the motive if we grant that there is such a thing as free will. It is not enough that the hero is justified by his conscience. "Fatalism forsooth! a conviction that whatever he does the deity enjoins."²⁷ The critic's point is that the individual must not set up his private judgment against established standards. Again, in an attack on novels appears the remark,

They universally tend to give force and effect to that passion which, of all others, interferes most with the necessary restraints of civilized society—they tend to impress upon the youthful mind, that what is delineated under the name of love, is the first object, the great business of life, to which every other dictate of prudence and of duty may be required to yield.²⁸

"Restraint" is the keynote of the thoughtful criticism of this type. It thinks always of man as subordinate to society.

²⁷ *Portfolio*, 1811. III 6. 190

²⁸ *Analectic*, 1817. 10. 298

More important still, it thinks of natural impulse as dangerous to social welfare, of individuals as lacking the judgment to decide between right and wrong, and of religion as the disciplinary force which makes social life possible. The philosophical sources of such conceptions are obvious; the immediate source was Calvinism.

But as the period advanced and new conceptions in religion and philosophy began to take effect, this point of view was significantly modified. The negative principle of religious restraint was slowly displaced by the positive principle of moral idealism. Now the question was not "Does this book make vice attractive?" but "Does it make virtue beautiful?" The critics who embraced this principle still reproved writers for immorality; but they did not look for it. And when they found it they called it not bad but ugly. Dana, for instance, said, "Nothing is vulgar but vice,"²⁹ and his friend Bryant declared that there is no poetry in vice, cruelty, injustice, and selfishness.³⁰ The *Christian Examiner*, revolting against the usual critical twaddle about the harmfulness of novels, said in a review of the much abused Bulwer-Lytton³¹ that most readers are judicious enough to be proof against corruption by novels; that a professed moral is not enough; that even poetic justice is not enough, for there is no such thing in nature as a just distribution of rewards and punishments. The important thing is for the writer to secure the reader's regard for the characters in proportion to their merit.

This idea was developed into a philosophy by Channing, who passed it on to the transcendentalists, but the active principle was not monopolized by the unitarians after 1830. Before then the trinitarians were, it is true, disposed to look with suspicion upon any literature that was anything but useful, and tended to neglect, in their literary criticism, the technique of literary productions. As long as critics felt that the need for "restraint" was primary, art was under suspicion,

²⁹ *North American Review*, 1817, 5, 368.

³⁰ *Lectures on Poetry*, 1825, No. 2, p. 17.

³¹ 1829, 6, 173.

for amusement was considered a loosener of the moral fiber in that it made men forget duty, and many were the novels that were rejected because they were merely diverting. But when the concept of moral idealism took hold, the religious sects began to quarrel over the question of which had done the most for art. The trinitarian *Christian Spectator* argued that Protestant Christianity had inspired the best verse, because poetry has its origin in the "deep and mystic recesses" of the soul; that Christianity had turned the eyes of poets from external to inward things; and that the Bible had led poets to deal with the spiritual in terms of the concrete.³² The trinitarian George B. Cheever declared that although unitarianism had made claims of a monopoly of taste and refinement, in reality it stripped religion of power and mystery and fear, and therefore cramped the imagination.³³ These remarks were undoubtedly retorts to the unitarians' attacks upon the lack of poetic idealism in the orthodox theology. The *Christian Examiner*, for example, had said in a satirical review of Pollok's *Course of Time*, "The general system respecting God's character and moral government of his creatures, on which the poem is founded, is, as we believe, altogether opposed to truth, and abhorrent to our better affections and principles, to all that is excellent in our nature. If so, it must be eminently unpoetical."³⁴

Both the liberal and the orthodox theologies, then, were striving to make the moral principle an active rather than a merely restrictive one, and from this point of view they may both be said to have contributed to the development of American transcendentalism. It is generally assumed that it was the unitarians alone who sponsored its growth. One need only point out that the first American clergyman who understood and felt sympathy with the transcendental philosophy of Coleridge and of Kant was James Marsh of Andover Seminary, which was founded as a protest against unitarian radi-

³² 1834. 6. 196

³³ *Address at Salem*, 4th of July, 1833, Salem, 1833

³⁴ 1829. 6. 100

calism. Marsh not only edited the first American editions of Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (1829) and *The Friend* (1831) but sponsored the editing by his pupil, W. G. T. Shedd, of the first complete American edition of Coleridge's works.³⁵

In general, it was the development of moral idealism as a literary principle in this period that made America ready for the moral earnestness which characterized the romantic period. The emphasis in criticism was upon moral effect, and literature was thought of in terms of the good it might do for the race. Art for art's sake was in every sense a foreign idea, and the fact explains, perhaps, the neglect of Poe in the following period. But, at its best, the moral point of view was a creative principle in that it engendered that ecstasy, that profound enthusiasm which is the essence of all great literature.

In our period moralism is to be seen at its best and its worst. At its worst it could make Prescott say of old Italian poetry that it contained "too much melody, too concentrated an attention to beauty";³⁶ at its best it resulted in Channing's definition of culture as disinterested benevolence, and in his remark that "The grand truth which pervades poetry is, that the beautiful is not confined to the rare, the new, the distant, —to scenery and modes of life open only to the few; but that it is poured forth profusely on the common earth and sky. . . ."³⁷

4. LITERATURE SHOULD BE OPTIMISTIC: IT SHOULD NOT CONDONE PHILOSOPHICAL PESSIMISM OR SKEPTICISM

This admittedly American principle has not been given its proper importance as a critical force. We are accustomed to think of it as a result of economic opportunity, and as evidence of rather shallow complacency. In a sense that is true. Howells said in 1891 that although in America there is disease and unhappiness,

³⁵ See Marjorie Nicolson: "James Marsh and the Vermont Transcendentalists," *PMLA*, 1925. 34. 28

³⁶ *North American Review*, 1824 19 387

³⁷ "The Present Age," 1841, *op. cit.*, p. 161

This is tragedy that comes in the very nature of things, and is not peculiarly American, as the large, cheerful average of health and success and happy life is. It will not do to boast, but it is well to see that, apart from these purely mortal troubles, the race here has enjoyed conditions in which most of the ills that have darkened its annals might be averted by honest work and unselfish behavior.³⁸

That this attitude is national rather than individual may be seen in the circumstance that George Bancroft said of Goethe in 1824,

Instead of describing sentiments of tenderness and true humanity and depicting the feelings which warm, cheer, and bless mankind in the seasons of bereavement or success, he has more frequently sketched the sorrows which spring from the imagination, and the evils to which men have become exposed by vices of refinement. He can, therefore, meet with sympathy only among those who have felt or observed the anguish of similar mental suffering. In Germany the characters in the *Elective Affinities* are acknowledged to be drawn with agonizing truth; but in the United States, thanks to the venerated sanctity of domestic attachment, the book would be thrown aside with incredulity as a false and dangerous libel on human nature.³⁹

Bancroft's attitude was typical of the period. Americans disliked gloominess in literature, and rarely failed to remark on it in their reviews of the Germans, of Byron, and of such of our own poets as indulged in it. The *American Monthly Review* said of Godwin that his monomaniac characters are as painful in literature as in real life.⁴⁰ Obviously, Americans did not like unpleasant realism. Dissenting voices were rare. Bryant, in an essay on "The Happy Temperament,"⁴¹ declared that "while cheerful dispositions are to be cultivated, sensibility to the sorrow and evils of life is not only the cause of philosophic exertion, but the source of peculiar satisfac-

³⁸ *Criticism and Fiction*, 1891, p. 129

³⁹ *North American Review*, 1824. 19. 314

⁴⁰ 1832. 1. 462

⁴¹ *North American Review*, 1817. 9. 206

tions which give balance and dignity to the character." In this there is a hint of that sentimental melancholy which was popular in early poetry, and which is referred to in Willard Phillips' assertion that "Practical, satisfied men cannot do justice to a gloomy poetic mood which is critical of the world."⁴² If the critics permitted gloom at all, it was only the kind which was obviously a literary pose and which carried the name of "sensibility."

But this optimism had two deep roots, one of which was philosophical and the other religious. From the point of view of religion, there was a notable change in the period which was no doubt the result of the break-up of Calvinism. The gloom which naturally attended Calvinistic doctrines was dispelled with the new conceptions of God as a benevolent being. But, as in the principle of moralism, there were negative and positive principles at work. The older conception of religion as force for restraint and a teacher of duty persisted, and is to be discovered in such disquisitions on the nature of happiness as Everett's review of Droz's epicurean dissertation on "The Art of Being Happy."⁴³ Droz, said Everett, advises the pursuit of happiness through the acquisition of leisure; but the right way is to immerse one's self in the ordinary business of the world, and to cultivate moral perfection. The positive principle was expressed by those who thought of religion as the source of serenity and peace. Such was Dana, who, attacking the literary introvert, said that he lacked "the cheerfulness and serenity that religion imparts to the soul."⁴⁴ But even more positive was the attitude of those who felt that true believers cannot be gloomy because they are aware of the essential goodness of God's purposes. The *American Monthly Magazine*, for instance, said of Goethe, "He looks upon the changeful scenes of life, without a cheering confidence in the deep wisdom by which they are ordered."⁴⁵

Here religion borders upon philosophy, and we are carried back to the early deists who developed the idea of universal

⁴² *Ibid*, 1816, 2 236

⁴³ *Ibid*, 1828, 27, 115

⁴⁴ *Spirit of the Pilgrims*, 1831, 4 428

⁴⁵ 1829 1 162

benevolence. Deism failed in America because it attacked theology, but Americans accepted and kept its optimism. Shaftesbury and Hutcheson had said that virtue is a natural expression of uncorrupted human nature; that the benevolent affections make up the real nature of man. Hume and the skeptics had denied this, and for them Americans had no sympathy. They preferred to think that man on the average is good, though they also believed him weak enough to need the restraints of government and religion. Accordingly they objected to pessimistic conceptions of human nature, and their objection was based on a primarily *social* philosophy. A reviewer objected to Eliza Leslie's satirical *Pencil Sketches* because she

. . . takes sarcastic views of persons and things and makes us acquainted with individuals whom we never wish to hear or think of again. . . . Whoever undertakes, then, to give sketches of life . . . must be careful to set these things in their true light, and to allow to each its just proportion, so that the whole impression conveyed by his writings shall be decidedly in favor of benevolence . . . , and he must . . . not leave an impression that may encourage those lighter degrees of misanthropy, which destroy all social feeling and break up the confidence which ought to exist between man and man.⁴⁶

Most of the critics thought of gloom as a selfish thing, as a product of too much introversion and a lack of proper social feeling. The poet Pinkney was attacked for his "abstracted and selfish gloom, and moodiness, his want of kindly human sympathies."⁴⁷ Byron was almost universally attacked for the gloominess of his heroes.

The truth behind all this is that optimism was felt to be a social necessity, and that pessimistic views of life were dangerous to the social order. Strangely enough, the critics blamed the pessimism of Byron and the Germans upon the doctrines of Rousseau, whose doctrine of perfectibility is generally thought of as partly responsible for the optimism of

⁴⁶ *North American Review*, 1833. 37. 467, 469

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1825. 21. 376

"Frontier America." Contemporary critics felt that his individualism was unsocial and that it led to unhappiness because it made men think of their private troubles rather than of the good of society.

5. LITERATURE SHOULD DEAL WITH THE INTELLIGIBLE, NOT THE
MYSTICAL OR OBSCURE

This principle was purely relative. Basically it is a question of how ready the American public was for the new visions and the new fields of poetry which romantic individualism had opened up. At first the subtleties of Coleridge and Shelley and Wordsworth were simply beyond the comprehension of the older critics who had been brought up on poetry the diction and subject matter of which had been familiar for a hundred years. But as the period advanced, a kind of natural selection took place. Wordsworth, it was found, was expressing concretely ideas which had appeared in one form or another in philosophy from Plato on; Coleridge was found readable except when he was too metaphysical; Shelley was almost completely unintelligible, and was ignored. Some of the critics eventually acquired a taste for poetry which was on the borderline of the communicable, but generally they disliked literature which went beyond the bounds of universal experience and general comprehension. The extreme of obtuseness is to be found in criticisms by Dr. McHenry in the *American Quarterly Review* and in his own *American Monthly Magazine* published in Philadelphia. He found incomprehensible all of the verse which had been inspired by Wordsworth or Coleridge. The other extreme is represented also in the *American Quarterly Review* (after its mysterious shift to romanticism), in a review of Wordsworth which praises "that delightful vagueness which the attempt to clothe in language our more elevated feelings and abstract thoughts, often produces."⁴⁸ A more intelligent defense of the obscure appears in the *Christian Examiner*, in a criticism of an address by Charles Follen, the distinguished student and teach-

⁴⁸ 1836. 20. 66

er of German. This article contains what is probably the only denial voiced in the whole period of the mysticism and obscurity of German philosophy. The reviewer attributes the common charge to the badness of the translations, and to the strangeness of its terminology: "What great science, we would ask, is not obscure before its nomenclature is understood and its definitions studied?"⁴⁹

The middle ground, which is most characteristic of American criticism in the nineteenth century, is best exemplified by a paragraph in an *American Monthly Review* article on Bryant, who is called "truly popular" because he is intelligible to all classes:

Some of his best qualities may not be distinctly perceived by all; but an effect is produced on all by the most delicate and secret part of his workmanship. . . . It is no affront to the multitude to say that they do not see the whole. . . . A lofty mind, in its eagerness to know more of our spiritual nature and capacities and of the relations that outward things sustain to us and to each other, may run into errors from mere impatience of what is obvious and near and be tempted to ease its craving and dissatisfaction with violent and whimsical phantasies when it cannot seize upon defined and communicable truths that seem grand enough for its desire and grasp. A wilfull distortion or obscuration of a familiar object or feeling may thus be mistaken for a discovery; and an unintelligibleness that belongs wholly to the writer, he may think well-enough accounted for by the novelty and profoundness of his speculation. There is no objection to a poet's . . . believing that more is yet to be known and ought to be known of the human soul, and its connexion with things present and things to come, and with the Supreme Intelligence. Let no one be satisfied with what is already ascertained or supposed to be ascertained. The bounds of reality are far beyond what the wildest dreamer has even conjectured. But even in regions of purest intelligence or passion, or depths never before explored, the poet should tell us only what in a sound use of his powers he has experienced there, and tell this too in a language that comes near to human sympathy. Probably that is always practicable where he does not deceive himself.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ 1832. 11. 375

⁵⁰ 1832. 1. 299

This statement represents the feeling of most of our critics concerning Kant and Coleridge, and it helps to explain the fate of several American writers of the nineteenth century. Until lately American criticism has decreed that poetry is not for the esoteric few but for the many, and that it is the duty of the poet to communicate intelligently and intelligibly whatever he has to say. It is only rarely that the American critic has called upon the reader to develop his understanding up to the level of the writer. F. H. Hedge did it in a review of Coleridge, when he said that the reader, to understand Kant fully, must have some of his powers of abstraction. "In order to become fully master of [his] meaning one must be able to find it in himself."⁵¹ But it was the very essence of the average criticism of that day that it subjected literature to the ideals and limitations of the reader. Whether that was a good or bad thing for literature must remain a question.

6. LITERATURE SHOULD BE SOCIAL IN POINT OF VIEW,
NOT EGOCENTRIC

In this principle is to be found the basis of all the others. American critics were solidly allied against the individualism which Rousseau had crystallized into a philosophy and which the modern humanists consider to be the root of all evil in literature written since the eighteenth century. The protest began in the first quarter of the century; it was uttered anew and forcibly by Lowell in his essays on Thoreau, Rousseau, and Percival; and lately it was in the mouths of Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt.

Lowell called it sentimentalism. Differentiating between it and sentiment, he said,

Sentiment is intellectualized emotion, emotion precipitated, as it were, in pretty crystals by the fancy. . . . It puts into words for us that decorous average of feeling to the expression of which society can consent without danger of being indiscreetly moved. . . . But the sentimentalist always insists on taking his emotion

⁵¹ *Christian Examiner*, 1833. 14 119

neat, and, as his sense gradually deadens to the stimulus, increases his dose till he ends in a kind of moral deliquium.

The sentimentalist is his own ideal. He avoids the actual because it conflicts with his theory. The sentimentalist does not think as much of what he does as of what the world thinks of it. To him, duty and beauty are alien; there is no noble completeness in his life.⁵²

Our early critics saw all that and said it, and it was the basis of all their objections to Byron and to his American imitators. To them sentimentalism was a disease which threatened the state because it encouraged revolt; which undermined religion because it despised all tradition and restraint; morals, because it substituted feeling for principle; society, because it spurned duty and the domestic virtues. In a word, sentimentalism spoiled man for decent participation in everyday life. And so Rousseau was called dangerous and was constantly under attack. There is no need to quote the critics' diatribes, but it is necessary to note that with all their hatred of his principles they admired his prose style and his "sensitivity." The very fact that they paid so much attention to a writer long dead suggests that they were conscious of his power and of his popular appeal.

The aspect of sentimentalism that they most despised was its egotism, and the effect of egotism on poetry. Poetry, they had been brought up to believe, was social. It had to do with universal subjects, and with the common thoughts of men. It respected social institutions, and strengthened the social and family affections and the marriage bond. But the new romantic poetry seemed to be concerned only with writer's private, often peculiar, and sometimes outrageous feelings. It was completely subjective; it was even misanthropic.

Some of the critics perceived that such subjectivity bred poetry, even though they did not believe in its wholesomeness. Willard Phillips said that Byron's poetry was a sort of

⁵² "Rousseau and the Sentimentalists"

journal of himself—one sees more of the writer than of his theme.

In Burns, Cowper, and Thompson, we see woods and fields and streams with precisely those emotions and associations which the objects themselves produce; in Byron we are always reminded that we are looking through a medium and are assuming the impressions of another instead of yielding ourselves to our own. . . . Thus the most ordinary objects sketched in the most hasty and careless manner, may be the basis of original and brilliant poetry.⁵³

So, too, the more conservative Prescott was annoyed by Byron's egotism "which disclaims all communion with mankind," but "all this exasperated sensibility, it is true, is the source of the highest music in poetry."⁵⁴ But Andrews Norton⁵⁵ would not make even that concession. Byron's characters, he said, have no character; they are himself, and his poetry is mere confessional.

The average critic's attitude is best expressed in a review by Gilman of the poems of Percival. This poet, he says, is profuse, imitative, and defiant of public opinion in matters of religion. But his main fault is that of Southey and Wordsworth:

. . . a disinclination to consult the precise intellectual tone and spirit of the average mass to whom their works are presented. . . . Theirs is the poetry of soliloquy. They write apart from and above the world. Their original object seems to be the employment of their faculties and the gratification of their poetical propensities.

That is why they are not popular. The classical writers adjusted themselves to the popular taste. But if the modern poet "does not study the common susceptibilities of the mass of his readers, and industriously tune the key-string of his own soul till it vibrates nearly in unison with the compounded note

⁵³ *North American Review*, 1817 5 103

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1823. 16 145

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1823. 21. 300

sent up from the general breathing of human nature," he will be a poet of the few.⁵⁶

"The compounded note"—one might well take it as the watchword of the critics of the period, for in that phrase is the seed of all their philosophies concerning poetry, religion, and the state.

* * * * *

These principles are broad and general. The deviations from them are many and interesting, and they do not cover some of the details of actual critical theory and practice. But they set the tone of the critical work of the period, and determined, in part, the nature of criticism throughout the century.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1823. 16. 104

III

SOURCES IN SCOTTISH PHILOSOPHY, AESTHETICS AND CULTURE

1. THE VOGUE OF SCOTCH THOUGHT IN AMERICA

THE "AMERICAN-NESS" of this code is such that a study of the influences which went into its making might seem to be a merely academic task. In the final analysis all the "sources" of a national culture are indigenous, since a nation always chooses those foreign "influences" which are congenial to its own temperament. But America is a child of the Old World, and in the first quarter of the century it was still very close to its parents. It was in that period that its native characteristics took shape, and it was then that it chose the textbooks which it proposed to study throughout its adolescence.

Nowhere is there better evidence of its choice than in periodical criticism, and if one goes beyond it into the education of the critics to find what books helped form their minds, one finds a world of source material of historical importance which scholarship has left almost untouched. The neglect of this material is to be accounted for, very likely, by the tendency of the literary historian to study not the average mind, but the original genius; to seek the causes of cultural innovations rather than of conventions; to find out what made various periods different from each other rather than why they were alike. But the movements of civilization have a way of fooling the historian by reviving old ideas in new forms, so that what seems to be a new departure may be in reality only a reaffirmation of an elemental and unchanging characteristic. American idealism, for instance, has been a veritable chameleon, and so, too, has been American "common sense."

The most obvious influence on the American critic was the British periodical, and the evidence is both internal and external. The very form of the American critical quarterly and monthly periodical was often a direct imitation of British journals. The *American Quarterly Review* and the *North American Review*, for instance, were imitations of the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews*, and Willis' *American Monthly Magazine* was modeled on Campbell's *New Monthly Magazine*. One gets the impression from American periodicals that the critics usually reviewed books with the opinions of the British critics in their minds. It does not matter that the Americans were constantly protesting against the treatment of their country in British periodicals. The *North American Review* could print a bitter article on "The Tone of British Criticism"¹ and yet say with pride that Percival had won the admiration of Campbell's magazine.² The *Portfolio* attacked the *Edinburgh Review*, but it reprinted articles from the *Quarterly Review*. The *American Quarterly Review* attacked the *Scottish Quarterly Review*, but remarked that it was glad that the *Edinburgh Review* had taken up the problem of modern novels.³ Our critics disliked the insults to America, but they could not conceal their admiration and respect for British criticism.

The British periodicals were widely and thoroughly read in America. Robert Walsh made, in his *American Review of History and Politics*, the interesting remark that he had intended to review Stewart's *Philosophical Essays* fully, but that the *Edinburgh Review* had done it first and better.⁴ The full significance of the statement is revealed in the fact that many of the British reviews were reprinted in American editions. Professor Mott says in his *History of American Magazines* (p. 131) that there were American editions of the *Quarterly Review*, the *New Monthly Magazine*, Cobbett's *Political Register*, the *Edinburgh Review*, and the *Foreign Quarterly*. The catalogue of the Andover Library (1838) records a New York

¹ 1830 31. 26

³ 1830. 8. 107

² 1823. 16. 109

⁴ 1811. 1. 355

edition of the *Edinburgh Review*, New York and Boston editions of the *Quarterly Review*, and a New York edition of the *Westminster Review*. A card in the catalogue of the New York Public Library records a New York edition of *Blackwood's Magazine*. Finally, C. J. Ingersoll, in a speech in praise of America's cultural advancement, stated that the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* Reviews had American circulations of about four thousand each, which were, singly, about equal to that of the *North American Review*.⁵

One might assume, from these facts, that one need go no further than the British periodicals for the sources of our critical ideas, but the assumption is unwarranted. It is perfectly true that most American critics would have agreed with the *Atlantic Magazine* that Jeffrey was the ablest critic of the age,⁶ but they thought of him as a colleague rather than as their master. The truth is that the Jeffrey group and the American critics went to the same school of philosophy and criticism and used the same textbooks. If their opinions were remarkably similar it is because their training was similar.

It is a commonplace that the America of the nineteenth century was culturally dependent upon England. It is more accurate to say that it was culturally allied with Scotland. In America the most popular foreign periodicals were the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* reviews and Campbell's *New Monthly Magazine*. All three were run by Scots who had been brought up in the same philosophical and critical tradition. The philosophical background was the Scotch "common sense" school; the critical and æsthetic tradition was that of Kames, Blair, and Alison, the "psychological" æstheticians. Now the interesting thing is that this philosophy and this æsthetics were just as popular in America as they were in Scotland.

To take the rhetoricians first. Their names were, at one time or another, on the lips of almost every American critic, and well they might be, for the works of these men were al-

⁵ *Discourse Concerning the Influence of America on the Mind*, London, 1824, p. 24.

⁶ 1825. 2 345

most household books in America. Lord Kames (Henry Home) published his *Elements of Criticism* in 1762; the Reverend Hugh Blair published his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* in 1783 (though he had been delivering them orally for over twenty years); the Reverend Archibald Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* appeared in 1790, but did not become popular until Jeffrey reviewed it in the *Edinburgh* in 1811 and developed its contents in the article on "Beauty" in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Supplement, 1816.⁷

Of Kames's book there were at least thirty-one American editions,⁸ the first, a reprint of the 7th London edition, appearing in Boston in 1796, and the last in New York in 1883. Nine of these were published before 1835. The Andover Seminary, training school for orthodox clergymen and, therefore, critics, had five copies of it. James Boyd, one of the American editors of the volume, said in the preface to the 1855 edition, "There seems to be no other work even at this date, that is fitted to supply its place, nor, without great disadvantage to the cause of education, can it be laid aside."

Blair's *Lectures* appeared in both complete and abridged editions totaling fifty-three, thirty-nine of which were published before 1835. There were thirty complete editions, seventeen before 1835, and twenty-three abridged editions, twenty-two before 1835. The Andover Library had fourteen copies, including twelve of the abridged edition published in Brooklyn in 1807. It is interesting to note that many of the

⁷ This six-volume supplement, published between 1816 and 1824, was edited by Dugald Stewart, chief of the Scottish philosophers, and is therefore further evidence of the influence which this group had upon the average reader of the day.

⁸ The following facts about American editions of these works are based on a search of the libraries of Harvard and Princeton, of the New York Public Library, of the New York Society Library, of the New York Public Library's edition of the Library of Congress catalogue, which is not complete, of Evans' catalogue of American books; of the catalogue of the American Antiquarian Society Library, and of as many printed catalogues of early mercantile and college libraries as I could find. I do not doubt that the list could be supplemented.

abridged editions were printed in small towns, probably for the use of local schools. I have found copies with imprints of publishers in Albany, Brookfield (Massachusetts), Wilmington, Exeter, Haverhill, Portland, Concord, and Brattleboro. In addition, some of the editors published separate volumes of questions on the text for the use of schools.

Of Alison's *Essays* there were nine editions, three before 1835. The first edition appeared in Boston in 1812.

The influence of these books was universal and pervasive. In the last decade of the eighteenth century, rhetoric became a part of the college curriculum, and by the first decade of the next century many institutions had established chairs or professorships of rhetoric. The standard text for the course was Blair's *Rhetoric*. It was probably first used at Yale, which adopted it in 1785, and Harvard did likewise in 1788.⁹ As a large majority of our critics were trained at these institutions it is almost certain that they learned Blair's maxims by rote according to the custom in the colleges of that day.¹⁰ Between 1800 and 1835 it was adopted by Columbia, Pennsylvania, Brown, North Carolina, Middlebury, Williams, Amherst, Hamilton, Wesleyan, and Union.¹¹ In the Philadelphia edition prepared by Abraham Mills in 1833 (one of several school teachers who brought out school editions with sets of questions) there is an excerpt from a criticism in the New York *Evening Post* stating that the work "has acquired the authority of a standard, and is one of the most used in our colleges and principal seminaries."

The influence of both Kames and Blair was perpetuated by numerous rhetorics, both English and American, which were based on their work but which limited their field to

⁹ It is recorded that in 1776 Timothy Dwight gave at Yale "a course of lectures similar in plan to the lectures of Blair," then not yet published *Cambridge History of American Literature*, IV, 471.

¹⁰ We can be certain that it was studied by two critics: Joseph Dennie (*Ellis Dennie and His Circle*, p. 27), and Sidney Willard (*Memories*, Boston, 1855, I, 270).

¹¹ Charles A. Fritz *The Content of the Teaching of Speech in the American College before 1850*, N. Y. U. thesis, ms., 1928, p. 64.

style and expression. Such were Richard Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric* (1823), which reached a seventh edition in 1846 and was adopted by Harvard, Brown, Colgate, Michigan, Williams, and Hamilton after 1830;¹² *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* by George Campbell, friend of Blair and disciple of Kames;¹³ George Gregory's *Letters on Literature, Taste, and Composition*, Philadelphia, 1809; James Montgomery's *Lectures on General Literature, Poetry, etc.* Harper's Family Library, 1833, and James Robert Boyd's *Elements of Rhetoric and Literary Criticism*, 1844, a simplification of Blair's *Rhetoric* which went through eight editions.

Of the professors of rhetoric who were indebted to Blair, the best known was Edward Tyrrell Channing, who held the Boylston Chair of Rhetoric and Oratory (established 1784) at Harvard for thirty-two years beginning in 1819. His predecessor in that post was better known as President of the United States; he was John Quincy Adams, who delivered his lectures from 1806 to 1809 and brought them out in 1810 as *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory*. It is a question, however, which of the two had more influence on American life, since Channing for a third of a century directed the writing of a majority of the literary men who dominated American literature between 1830 and 1880. One of his eminent pupils, Andrew Preston Peabody, wrote that his appointment was perhaps the most important ever made in the interest of American literature.¹⁴ His *Lectures Read to the Seniors in Harvard College*, Boston, 1856, shows the influence not only of Blair and Kames but of the whole school of Common Sense philosophers. As teacher, as editor of the *North American Review*, and as critic throughout his active career, he was a significant figure in the literary life of the period.¹⁵

One other Scotch "rhetoric" deserves special notice, though it never appeared in book form. This was Thomas Camp-

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 79

¹³ A. F. Tytler *Memoirs of Kames*, 1814, I, 446

¹⁴ *Harvard Reminiscences*, Bost., 1888, p. 86

¹⁵ See sketch of Channing, p. 185.

bell's "Lectures on Poetry," which were written and delivered in 1812 at the Royal Institute, and printed in the *New Monthly Magazine* from time to time between 1821 and 1825. This magazine was immensely popular in America, and the Lectures were often referred to.

The rhetoricians and æstheticians were closely allied, intellectually and socially, with the Scotch Common Sense philosophers. The founder of the school was Thomas Reid (1710-1796) of King's College, Aberdeen; his successor was Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), whose work was carried on by Thomas Brown (1778-1820). One might also include in this group Adam Smith, though his work was economic rather than philosophical, and David Hume, for it was Kames, Hume, Ferguson, and Smith who formed what they called the Poker Club, and later, the Select Society. But, intellectually, Hume had almost nothing in common with the others. In fact, one of the objects of the Common Sense school was to combat his skepticism, and Kames wrote his *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* in opposition to Hume's doctrines. Curiously enough, Kames's orthodoxy was questioned as a result, and Blair came to his defense. It was Kames who urged Blair to give his lectures, and Smith said of Kames that he was their master in literary matters. Smith, in turn, supplied many ideas for Blair's book, for he had himself lectured on the subject from 1748 to 1751.¹⁶ But Stewart was, in a sense, the sponsor of the group. He had praised Kames's work, and Alison had dedicated his *Essays* to him. Stewart took a paternal interest in Thomas Campbell and introduced him to Alison "whom he ever afterwards delighted to honor as his intellectual father."¹⁷ Stewart was also a member of the Friday Club in 1803, which was made up of critics and philosophers and included Alison, Scott, Jeffrey, Murray, Brougham, and Thomas Campbell.¹⁸

¹⁶ Tytler's *Kames*, I, 266

¹⁷ William Beattie. *Life and Letters of Thomas Campbell*, London, 1849, I, 241

¹⁸ Henry Thomas Cockburn. *Life of Lord Jeffrey*, Edinburgh, 1852, I, 148

Socially, then, the philosophers, æstheticians, and critics were closely connected, and I shall show later the effects of the philosophy of Common Sense on Edinburgh criticism. But the works of the philosophers were also familiar to Americans. The American quarterlies printed long reviews of Stewart and Brown, most of which contained references to Reid, and almost without exception they preferred their philosophy to that of Hume, Kant, and Coleridge.

In 1829 James Marsh wrote Coleridge that whereas American colleges formerly taught their students Locke, they now taught Stewart and Brown; and that furthermore it was Stewart's *History of Philosophy* which kept students away from German philosophy.¹⁹ There is evidence enough on that point in the early college catalogues. Benjamin Rand, in his studies of philosophical instruction at Harvard,²⁰ has shown that Scottish philosophy predominated throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Levi Hedge, who taught there from 1800 to 1832, was devoted to Reid, Stewart, and Brown, and brought out an abridgment of Brown's *Treatise on the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (Cambridge, 1827).

Woodbridge Riley says that "New England . . . was of too fine a spirit to be satisfied with the coarser methods of Common Sense; the South had too much of the Anglican indifference, too much of the Gallic skepticism, to accept as final the dogmatism of a small group of North British philosophers."²¹ That may have been true of the eighteenth century, but it most emphatically was not true of the nineteenth. Rand's articles prove that concerning Harvard; and the catalogue of Andover Seminary Library proves that it was not true of Andover or of New England in general, for the Seminary owned many copies of all the Scotch philosophers' works, including an edition of Brown published at Andover in 1822.

¹⁹ J. L. Torrey, ed. *Remains of the Reverend James Marsh*, Boston, 1843, p.

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²⁰ "Philosophical Instruction in Harvard University, 1639-1900," *Harvard Graduates' Magazine*, 1928-1929. 37. 29, 188, 296

²¹ *American Philosophy, the Early Schools*, p. 18

We have Channing's word that Andover adopted Brown into its curriculum in 1828.²² As for Yale, one needs no more evidence that it found Scotch philosophy congenial than that the *Christian Spectator*, published at New Haven, praised it repeatedly. Neither was it true of the South in our period, for an edition of Reid, edited by Stewart, was published in Charleston in 1813, and both the *Portico* and the *Southern Review* reviewed admiringly the work of the Scots.

It was at Princeton, however, that the philosophy of the Scots was earliest and most heartily accepted.

In the propaganda of this common sense philosophy, as an antidote to Voltairean infidelity and Humean pyrrhonism, the College of New Jersey was the chief agent. Natural realism, officially introduced into the country by President Witherspoon of Princeton, formed an entering wedge of thought which was destined to push aside the resisting masses of Southern materialism and to deflect even the more intangible forces of Northern idealism.²³

It was Princeton that harbored the greatest interpreters of Scotch realism, and that sent forth apostles to teach the doctrine in the periodical criticism of Philadelphia. John Witherspoon, the first of its Scotch sons, published his *Lectures on Moral Philosophy and Eloquence* in Philadelphia (third edition in 1810). Samuel Stanhope Smith contributed both literature and a vigorous administration as President of Princeton to the cause of Scotch realism. Samuel Miller, who was converted to realism by John Ewing, Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, glorified the cause in his *Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*; and Frederic Beasley, who was educated at Princeton, further advanced the cause as Provost of Pennsylvania.

It is no wonder, then, that American critics of the period were saturated in realistic philosophy, for it was a part of most college men's education. As Riley says,

²² Elizabeth P. Peabody, *Reminiscences of W. E. Channing*, Boston, 1880, p. 140.

²³ Riley, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

The history of American philosophy is in great measure the history of American colleges; not only did that philosophy grow under their growth and strengthen with their strength, but also through them it spread in ever widening circles over the land, and thereby gradually filtered down among the masses.

2. THE REALISTIC PHILOSOPHY

It is apparent, then, that the chief influences on the mind of the American critic were Scotch criticism and Scotch philosophy. It remains to show what that philosophy was and what effect it had on critical theory.

I can do no better than to quote the definitions of Scottish Realism which Riley takes from the statements of its principal American adherents, Samuel Miller and President McCosh of Princeton:

Natural realism, according to an early American exponent, consists in the doctrine that the mind perceives not merely the ideas or images of external objects but the external objects themselves; that when these are presented to our senses, they produce certain impressions; that these impressions are followed by correspondent sensations; and these sensations by a perception of the existence and qualities of the objects about which the mind is employed, and that they possess the qualities which we witness, not by a train of reasoning, by formal reflection or by association of ideas, but by a direct and necessary connection between the presence of such objects and our consequent perceptions. In short the distinguishing peculiarity of such metaphysics is an appeal from the delusive principles of the idealism of Berkeley and the scepticism of Hume to the common sense of mankind as a tribunal paramount to all subtleties of philosophy.

From McCosh:

Realism, says the latter, is that system which holds that there are real things and that man can know them; that we have no need to resort to such theories as those of internal ideas or occasional causes coming between the perceiving mind and the perceived objects; but that the mind knows directly and intuitively three kinds of reality, first, matter, whether existing in

the body or out of the body as external, extended, and resisting; second, the perceiving self as thinking or willing, a reality as certain and definite as matter, but perceived by self-consciousness and not the external senses; third, the objects perceived by our conscience or moral perception, the higher knowledge of voluntary acts as being morally good or evil. The mind perceives matter at once, but it also perceives benevolence, and perceives it to be good as clearly as the eye perceives objects to be extended. In brief, in all our cognitions, our intuitive convictions carry with them their own evidence and authority; adopt any other theory, say idealism, and make the mind add to things as it perceives them, or phenomenalism, which makes us know mere appearances, and we shall find ourselves ever knocking against intuitive conviction as against obstinate facts facing us as rocks. By the help of these fundamental laws of belief, with their criteria of self-evidence, necessity and universality, we can stand up for the trustworthiness of the senses and do not require to call in to our help, "ideas" with Locke, or "impressions" with Hume, or "phenomena" with Kant, but may follow our natural convictions implicitly and regard the mind as perceiving things immediately and running no risk of deceptions or contradictions.²⁴

This summary presents all one needs to know of the subject for the present purpose. The aspects of this philosophy which interest us at the moment, because they throw light on American critical principles and on the reasons for the popularity of this system in America, are:

- (1) Its appeal to the common sense of the average man as opposed to the subtlety of the philosopher, and its opposition to involved and mystical theories;
- (2) Its support of religious faith through its affirmation of the reality of our intuitive convictions, and of the authority of the conscience;
- (3) Its assumption of a benevolent God and of a benevolent principle in human nature;
- (4) Its empirical method;
- (5) Its possible connection with transcendentalism through the principle of intuition.

²⁴ Riley, *op. cit.*, p. 475

Of the weaknesses of this system as a philosophy there is ample evidence, but that it represents the limits of the average man's philosophical thinking there can be little question. To quote Riley again, it was

. . . preëminently the American philosophy. This is true if one considers its rapid growth, its wide spread, and its tenacious hold upon the popular mind. Brought in as a transatlantic off-shoot of the Scotch school, it overran the country, had at one time an exclusive and preponderant influence, and has lasted until the present hour. For this astonishing success many reasons have been given: not only was the common sense philosophy of Reid, Stewart, Brown and Hamilton in harmony with the practical note of the country but it was also an aid to faith, a safeguard to morality as against the skepticism of Hume and the atheism of the Voltairians. Granting the validity of such arguments, they may be more properly classified from two points of view: internally as intrinsic excellences; externally as adventitious aids.

Adventitious: First it happened to fit the needs of educational and ecclesiastical orthodoxy. It was not, as in Scotland, favoured by the union of church and state, but by the peculiar American combination of church and college. Here not only was the philosophy of reality convenient, compact, and teachable, appealing to a common sense of which every youngster had some spark, but it was also an eminently safe philosophy, which kept undergraduates locked in so many intellectual dormitories, safe from the dark speculations of materialism or the beguiling allurements of idealism. . . . Therefore, to prevent the undermining of the faith, college professors took philosophy seriously and not speculatively, and a religious bias helped to determine the success of realism in education. A second cause for the success of realism lay in the organizations upon which it chanced to fasten. In its propaganda it used most of the denominational colleges on the Atlantic seaboard, and was also backed by the denominations themselves. Here the churches, like well-constructed machines, turned out uniform sets of opinions all fitting the same mould of common sense; for to obtain many men of one mind, the Protestant clergy of these times were practically all formed from the Scotch pattern, the text-books of Reid and Stewart, Beattie and Hamilton coming from the native press in an almost un-

broken series of editions. A third cause of the success of realism was the character of immigration into the country. Between the New Englanders with their modified Calvinism, and the Southerners with their diluted Arminianism, there came a wave of new settlers, which on touching the American shore spread itself more widely than any other. . . . The Scotch-Irish . . . carried along with their Presbyterian connections their philosophy of common sense. To trace this movement into the Alleghany Mountains and down the valleys of Virginia and of the Cumberland, is to trace a kind of intellectual glacier, an overwhelming mass of cold facts which moved slowly southwards and ground out all opposition. This glacial age of American thought was of the greatest significance. Because of it deism disappeared, save in the tide-water counties where planters of English blood still remained, and materialism was wiped out, save in the Gallicised portions of the country, such as the Carolinas, and the Bourbon sections of Kentucky.²⁵

That is not to say that all our thinkers accepted Scotch philosophy uncritically. In fact, one of the most interesting developments of the period was the modification of realism in the direction of idealism. Even the conservative critics saw the faults of the system, and searched restlessly for a more intellectually satisfying one. A. H. Everett, for instance, said that it was "entirely baseless when viewed as a mere expression of the common sense of the world, and when considered as a form of idealism a defective and untenable exposition of a theory essentially false."²⁶ But the same article makes it clear that Everett was emotionally in sympathy with the Scots, and that his objection to them was that they were not technically good philosophers. There was, in the third decade, a barely perceptible tendency to return to the philosophy of Locke, a reaction caused, in Everett at least, by a perception of the defects of realism as a system and by a natural dislike of the abstruseness of the philosophically valid Kant. Everett said "We are ourselves . . . fully satisfied with those parts of the theory of Locke which the Scotch and the Germans thought

²⁵ Riley, *op. cit.*, p. 476

²⁶ *North American Review*, 1829 29. 67

it necessary to abandon."²⁷ That others thought likewise is evident in the circumstance that Joseph Giles, a professor of philosophy at Harvard, substituted Locke for Thomas Brown in the curriculum of 1833-1834.²⁸ However, this was a late, a local, and probably a temporary reaction, and is to be accounted for by the fact that in Brown's handling of realism there was a trace of Hume's skepticism. But that this was a matter of interpretation may be seen in the defense put up for him by the conservative *Christian Spectator*,²⁹ and in his adoption by Andover.

3. SCOTCH RHETORIC AND ÆSTHETIC

Some of the influences which realism had upon æsthetics and criticism are by now apparent. They come out clearly in an examination of the principles of Scotch rhetoric and æsthetic. These principles were by no means static. There was a space of almost thirty years between Kames's *Elements* and Alison's *Essays*, but even time does not explain the metamorphosis which took place. The fact is that, on the surface, at least, Scotch æsthetics appealed to reason rather than to authority, and rational systems have a way of fathering strange children. If the individual is allowed to use his reason at all, nothing can stop him from adapting inherited principles to his own needs.

All systems, however which do not end in negation, begin with a dogma. Professor Carl Becker, in his *The Heavenly City of Eighteenth Century Philosophers*, points out that Locke and his followers merely substituted a new dogma for an old one. Similarly the theorizers on æsthetics in the second half of the eighteenth century substituted a dogmatic belief in "what is" for an older one of "what ought to be."

The thinking of our rhetoricians was based in part on that of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. It was Shaftesbury's idea that the *sense of beauty* and the *moral sense* are natural in men; that virtue is an exercise of natural affections; that morality

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1830. 31 220

²⁸ Rand, *op. cit.*, p. 46

²⁹ 1821. 3. 583; 1826. 8. 141

exists independently of religion; and that virtue and beauty are fundamentally allied. Hutcheson carried the doctrine further by proposing that the mind is made up of a number of senses: the sense of the pleasurable, the public or communal sense, the moral sense, and the sense of beauty. He further explained the sense of beauty by means of a theory of association, which became the basis of Scotch æsthetics. According to this theory, the sense of beauty operates when objects become connected in our minds with emotions; for instance, cool groves are mentally and emotionally associated with solitude and retreat.

The thinking of Kames shows many similarities to that of Hutcheson. He was a typical eighteenth-century rationalist, a theorizer on men and morals, an active man in public life, and an experimenter in such practical fields as agriculture. In many ways he was like our own Franklin, and indeed the two were friends and corresponded with each other. Franklin particularly admired Kames's *Art of Thinking* (1761), a manual intended to train students to observe and then to draw conclusions from their observations.⁸⁰

In his *Elements of Criticism* (1762) he tried to find the causes of pleasure, to discover the rules of criticism by tracing the pleasurable emotions to their sources in the constitution of the human mind.⁸¹ In this principle we find the difference between the rationalists and the earlier theorizers who went to Aristotle for their principles. But here Kames was anticipated by Burke. In *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756) Burke had proposed, as Kames did later, that the standard of reason and taste is universal, and that the fixed principles of taste might be discovered by an inquiry into the common experience of men. He found that taste depends not upon a superior prin-

⁸⁰ Tytler, *op. cit.*, I, 363

⁸¹ Kames's work was one of eight books on poetics which appeared between 1761 and 1765, all of them containing new ideas and attitudes. See Eric Partridge: "The 1762 Efflorescence of Poetics," *Studies in Philology*, 1928. 25-27, and Edward Niles Hooker. "The Discussion of Taste, from 1750 to 1770, and the New Trends in Literary Criticism," *PMLA*, 1934. 49-577

ciple but upon superior knowledge and greater natural sensibility. Thus, some men have better taste than others, but in all men taste operates on the same principles.

Kames applied these ideas to the fine arts and came to a number of conclusions which form the basis of much subsequent criticism. But his assumptions must be looked into, for they embody a contradiction which caused confusion in both American and Scotch criticism. In the first place, Kames was an aristocrat and a supporter of the existing monarchy. He dedicated his book to George III and solicited the royal patronage on the ground that he treated the fine arts, which were beneficial to society: "By uniting different ranks in the same elegant pleasures they promote benevolence; by cherishing love of order they enforce submission to government." He "attempts to form a standard of taste by unfolding those principles which ought to govern the taste of every individual." These ideas are further elucidated in Chapter XXV, "The Standard of Taste." The common nature of man, he says, is invariable and will always be the same. We all believe alike morally. Men are uneasy when they find that their beliefs differ from others. "We are framed by nature to have a high relish for fine arts."

Now these principles are seemingly democratic. In fact, it is probable that Scotch æsthetic appealed to America as much as it did because it seemed to harmonize with American political idealism. Yet Kames's address to the king reveals that he was not democratic at all. The fact is that he was not speaking for mankind, but for his own economic and social class. In Chapter XXV we are told that "those who depend for food on bodily labor are totally devoid of taste," and that the standard is to be found among people of education, reflection, and experience. That is anything but a definite distinction, but the intent of it is clear enough. The rationalists found arbitrary rules distasteful, but they had no intention of granting intellectual and æsthetic freedom to the mob. The substitute was a system developed out of their own tastes and prejudices. The English and American quarterly critics operated on the same principle.

The following summary of the principles which Kames discovered in his examination of "human nature" is to be understood in the light of a belief which he held in common with Thomas Reid, and which was not followed by later Scotch critics. Kames did not use the "associational" system in his inquiry. He believed that beauty was absolute and intrinsic and that "nature has marked everything high or low, plain or elegant, strong or weak," a dogma which was, of course, prohibitive of progress in æsthetics. For his own period, however, his conclusions were reasonable enough, and many of them were carried over into criticism of the nineteenth century in England and America:

- (1) Emotions of beauty always suggest sweetness and gayety. (Chap. III)
- (2) Proportion is beautiful, but uniformity disgusts by excess. (Chap. III)
- (3) Beauty of figure results from regularity, uniformity, proportion, order, and simplicity. (Chap. III)
- (4) The cause of the emotion of grandeur and sublimity is size and height. But the emotion must be agreeable. (Chap. IV)
- (5) When describing a sublime figure, keep out the trivial and the low. (Chap. IV)
- (6) In literature there should be no rapid succession of dissimilar emotions. (Chap. VII)
- (7) Variety should be used in proportion to length. (Chap. IX)
- (8) Congruity and propriety are required by natural law. They are also elements of moral law, e g., in reward and punishment. (Chap. X)
- (9) The external signs of emotion and passion are invariable. (Chap. XV)
- (10) Immoderate passions ought to be hidden or dissembled as much as possible, as it is against nature that passion should prevail over reason and conscience. (Chap. XVI)
- (11) Of the vowels i, e, a, o, u, the most pleasant are those removed from the extremes (Chap. XVIII)

- (12) Clearness is not to be sacrificed to beauty. (Chap. XVIII)
- (13) The difference between verse and prose is in the number, variety, and length of syllables, and in the arrangement of words and pauses. (Chap. XVIII)
- (14) The sense of poetry must never be obscured by musical effects. (Chap. XVIII)
- (15) Rhyme is not good for sublime subjects, or for subjects of anguish or distress, but it is natural for light, gay subjects. (Chap. XVIII)
- (16) Personification is the result of passion and is derived from nature. (Chap. XX)
- (17) When writing to give pleasure (as opposed to instruction), describe appearance, not reality. (Chap. XXI)

Some of these "rules" were followed by the early romantic writers and some were not; some were old-fashioned even then, and some were suggestive of what was to come. Parallels between them and the critical dicta of the American periodicals are too numerous to list; the significant point is that both Kames and the critics substituted the authority of experience—eighteenth-century experience, usually—for the authority of historical literary principles; and that both insisted on the taste of society, according to their conception of society, as opposed to the taste of the individual artist. The artist must conform to the public, not the public to the artist. The artist must listen to the "compounded note."

Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* is less philosophical, more elementary, and more purely literary. It is primarily a textbook. But it is a textbook which half the educated English-speaking world studied in its day, and its day was astonishingly long. G. H. Cowling says that romanticism killed it.⁸² It would be more accurate to say that romanticism absorbed it, if we may judge by Wordsworth's indebtedness to Blair.⁸³ It is in general a summary of late

⁸² "The English Teaching of Dr. Hugh Blair," *Palaestra*, 148, Band II, 1925, p. 281

⁸³ See E. C. Knowlton: "Wordsworth and Hugh Blair," *Philological Quar-*

neo-classical opinion by a colleague of the Common Sense philosophers.

In 1762 the king endowed a chair in Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at the University of Edinburgh and appointed Blair professor. He first attracted attention by encouraging Macpherson to publish his *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* and by writing, himself, a *Critical Dissertation on Ossian*, 1763.³⁴ He found, when he resigned in 1783, that imperfect manuscript copies of his lectures had been exposed to sale; as a result he published them himself in the same year.³⁵ By 1812 the volume had gone through twelve editions.³⁶

Like Kames, Blair sought the principles of taste in the experience of mankind; like Kames, he thought of taste as a native faculty with which all men are endowed; like Kames, he modified his theory, somewhat illogically, by limiting his "public." "Genuine public taste," he said, thinking very likely of the popularity of trashy novels, "does not always appear in the first applause." (Lect. III) Taste is a faculty undeveloped in most people, but improvable through exercise and reason. The characteristics of good taste are delicacy and correctness. Correctness means the rejection of counterfeit beauties. The man of correct taste "estimates with propriety the comparative merit of the several beauties which he meets with in any work of genius; refers them to their proper classes; assigns the principles, as far as they can be traced, whence this power of pleasing flows; and is pleased himself precisely in that degree in which he ought, and no more." (Lect. II)

So far, Blair and Kames were in complete accord. They both thought of literature as an art to be enjoyed through

terly, 1927, 6. 277; and Arthur Beatty: *William Wordsworth, His Doctrine and Art in Their Historical Relations*, Madison, 1922. (*University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature*, No. 17. Second edition in 1927, with important changes.)

³⁴ This was reprinted in Morristown, N. J., 1813. See Mary R. Bowman. *The Reception of Ossian in America*, University of Chicago thesis, 1926

³⁵ John Hill: *Account of the Life and Writings of Hugh Blair*, Edinburgh, 1807, p. 43

³⁶ Cowling, *op cit*, p. 282

analysis, and of literary enthusiasm as indecorous. That a great deal of English and American criticism was written in the same spirit was not an accident. The lack of joyously appreciative criticism in America before 1830 cannot be surprising in the light of such doctrines

Blair's special interest lay in the theory of the sublime. From Burke he took the idea that the sublime gets its best effects from obscurity, but unlike Burke he thought of sublimity as a quality of things rather than of expression "In all good writing the sublime lies in the thought, not in the words; when the thought is noble the language will be dignified." (Lect. IV) Longinus, he said, often called sublime that which was merely elegant. Sublimity is really based on vastness, awfulness, or solemnity. Rhyme is unfavorable to the sublime, which demands freedom, boldness, and variety.

This doctrine had considerable effect on both criticism and creative work. It was partly because of it, perhaps, that so many early American poets chose vast subjects and stately forms for their verse. The writers of American epics in the first decade of the nineteenth century were inspired by the epic nature of America's conquest, no doubt, but they probably also remembered with what respect the rhetorics treated grandiose poetic themes. The word "sublime" was constantly in the mouths of the critics, and it was only after Romanticism had established the worth of the short personal lyric on intimate subjects that it ceased to be a critical catchword.

He defined Beauty as productive of calmer emotion than Sublimity—a quality gentle, soothing, and serene. Sublimity raises feelings too violent to be lasting; the emotion of Beauty lasts longer. The sources of Beauty are in color, figure, gentle motion, the human face, art, novelty, melody, and humor.

Lectures VI-IX are devoted to the history and structure of language. Lectures X-XIII deal with style and sentence structure, and here he makes a long and eloquent plea for simplicity, clarity, propriety, and precision—all of them criteria in early American criticism. Some of his principles are admirable and have been retained in all rhetorical teaching,

but his dictum that long words are more musical than short ones may have been partly responsible for the continued Latinity of English style. The general effect of his lectures on style was to encourage correctness and stiffness rather than suppleness and native idiom. O. W. Holmes, in the second chapter of the *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, says, regarding a rather stilted paragraph:

I don't believe any man ever talked like that in the world. I don't believe I talked just so; but the fact is, in reporting one's conversation, one cannot help *Blair-ing* it up more or less, ironing out crumpled paragraphs, starching limp ones, and crimping and plaiting a little sometimes; it is as natural as prinking at the looking glass.

In his discussion of diction, Lectures XIV-XVIII, he analyzes the various types of figures, with the idea of encouraging naturalness in metaphor. But he did not do the cause of literature a service by insisting that the familiarity of common words degrades style. It was very likely due in part to Blair that Wordsworth's ideas about native idiom took so long to reach the mind of the average reader and critic, and his influence on American critics is apparent in almost every periodical.

His advice on versification is innocuous (Lect. XXXVIII). He thinks of blank verse and heroic verse as the same except for rhyme, an idea which many of our critics held. Poetry he defines as "the language of passion, or of enlivened imagination, formed, most commonly, into regular numbers." (Lect. XXXVIII) Such a definition could do no harm except that it encouraged the idea that rhythm is a matter of artificial arrangement of syllables. He defines lyric poetry as "the ode," omitting all other varieties from the discussion, but devotes many chapters to epic and dramatic poetry. Lecture XL, on Didactic Poetry, presents just the point of view which might be expected: "The ultimate end of all poetry and indeed of every composition, should be to make some useful impression on the mind"

The work of Alison was a new departure in Scotch æsthetics. He applied to æsthetics the principle of the Association of Ideas which had been developed by Hutcheson and Hartley, and the result was a new literary-philosophical principle which was of the greatest importance in the genesis of romantic criticism. Because of it, the old, necessarily conservative, idea of the intrinsic beauty of objects was undermined, and the conception of *subjectivity*, which is the essence of romanticism, took its place.³⁷ But the transition came about so quietly that the contemporary critics hardly perceived it.

The *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* was first published in 1790, but did not attract wide attention until Francis Jeffrey reviewed it in 1810. The volume was dedicated to Dugald Stewart, who was immediately responsible for the change in æsthetic theory within the Common Sense group. Stewart believed that a multiplicity of factors enter into the perception of the beautiful; that the mind not only perceives but *creates* in its apprehension of the beautiful. As a result, he thought of poetry as primarily an emotional vehicle. "The poet," he said, "addresses the understanding only as a vehicle of pleasure," and he believed accordingly that good poetry is not abstract but concrete—that poetic pleasure comes from the contemplation of images. Here, then, in the philosophy of the conservative school, we find a contribution to romantic thought. "Reading Dugald Stewart," says Oliver Elton, "we feel that the path is made ready for Coleridge."³⁸

Alison developed the idea further. "Taste," he says in his Preface, "is . . . that faculty of the human mind by which we perceive and enjoy whatever is beautiful or sublime in the works of Nature or Art. . . . The perception of these qualities is attended with an emotion of pleasure, very distinguishable from every other pleasure of our nature, and which is accordingly distinguished as the Emotion of Taste. The distinction of the objects of taste, into the Sublime and the Beautiful,

³⁷ For the relationship between "Association" and "Imitation," see C. Fe-
deles. *Versuch über Alison's Ästhetik*, München, 1911

³⁸ *Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830*, 1924, I, 231

has produced a similar division of this emotion into the Emotion of Sublimity and the Emotion of Beauty. . . The qualities that produce these emotions are to be found in almost every class of the objects of human knowledge," both in scenery and in the mind of man.

But—and here is the new principle—"These qualities are not the objects of immediate observation. . . They are often obscured under the number of qualities with which they are accidentally combined. . . They are . . . perhaps, dependent upon the state of our own minds." The emotion of Beauty is the product of a train of agreeable ideas set up in the imagination by objects associated with the simple emotions. "When the material qualities cease to be significant of the associated qualities, they cease also to produce emotion. . . ."

Taken without modification, such a principle must inevitably have led to radical subjectivity both in creation and criticism. But Alison was a product of the school of Hutcheson, whose philosophy was fundamentally social. He assumed, with them, that the moral and æsthetic law operated in individuals with marked uniformity, and that Association changed not with the individual but with society. Accordingly, the bulk of his book is made up of a discussion of the general associations which are set up by qualities of sound, color, form, motion, the human countenance, etc., and the result is a catalogue of neo-classical associations remarkably similar to those of Kames and Blair. Sublime sounds are those allied with danger, e.g., storms, power, and majesty; blue eyes suggest softness, darkness suggests melancholy, etc. The general tone of his volume, then, is anything but radical. It seems more than ever to make æsthetic experience a *group* reaction rather than a personal one. But in the principle behind it there was dynamite which might have been used to blow up the whole structure of Scotch critical thinking, and when Jeffrey tried to use the principle, he had to take a stand which, from the point of view of pure logic, was almost absurd. Both Alison and Jeffrey had to admit that there were two kinds of association, universal and individual. They were

safe as long as they could assume that their intellectual world was homogeneous; but by 1835 that assumption was no longer warranted. Their "universal" world had acquired a taste for new and striking "individual" associations

Nevertheless, the theory was of the greatest significance in the development of "transcendentalism" in the work of Wordsworth and his group, for it made possible the conception of new social values in poetry. The new conception of nature as a healer and a teacher of men, as a religious and moral force, rested upon new associations which were at first individual with Wordsworth and became general when the world learned what he meant. Wordsworth himself insisted that his ideas were not a private peculiarity but the expression of a spirit of which everyone might partake if he would only open his mind and heart and allow his better nature to assert itself.³⁹ Alison himself sought authority for his theory in the doctrines of the Platonic school:

The opinion I have now stated coincides, in a great degree, with a *Doctrine* that appears very early to have distinguished the Platonic School; which is to be traced, perhaps, amid their dark and figurative language, in all the philosophical systems of the East, and which has been maintained in this country, by several writers of eminence; such as Lord Shaftesbury, Dr. Hutcheson, Dr. Akenside, and Dr. Spense, but which has been maintained nowhere so firmly and so philosophically as by Dr. Reid in his invaluable work on the *Intellectual Powers of Man*. The doctrine to which I allude, is, that matter is not beautiful in itself, but derives its beauty from the expression of the mind.⁴⁰

Whatever one may think of the "Platonism" of Thomas Reid, the connection of Alison's theory with romantic idealism cannot be overlooked. It is an outspoken plea for enthusiasm in art in contrast to the cold, analytical methods of Blair and Kames; it represents a shift from the negative moralism and didacticism of Addison and Steele to the dy-

³⁹ Wordsworth's debt to Alison is discussed by Arthur Beatty in *William Wordsworth, His Doctrine and Art in their Historical Relation*, as cited above.

⁴⁰ *Essays*, N.Y., 1830, p. 402.

namic moralism of Wordsworth and the Transcendentalists, it embodies the new dogma of the spiritual relationship between man and nature which, in American criticism, was to receive its first convincing expression in the work of Channing. "If there were intrinsic beauty and sublimity," says Alison, "the pleasures of taste must be independent of moral emotion. The compositions of the artist, instead of awakening all the enthusiasms of fancy and feeling, must have been limited to excite only the cold approbation of faithful outline and accurate detail. No secret analogies, no silent expressions, would then have connected enjoyment with improvement; and in contradiction to every other appearance of human nature, an important source of pleasure would have been bestowed without any relation to the individual or social advancement of the human race." In our system "we perceive a lofty end." Nature awakens us to moral emotion because the appearances of the material world lead us directly to "religious sentiment."

The reception of this doctrine in America is interesting. We may conclude, from the *North American Review*⁴¹ criticism of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article on Beauty by Jeffrey, who adopted Alison's general theory, that in 1818 Boston was not yet ready for the moral idealism which the system applied. The critic (F. W. Winthrop) seemed willing enough to accept the old catalogues of Association. "If it be necessary to our happiness, that our taste should be conformable to that of others, we must look into the material and intelligent universe for our standard of taste." But he rejected absolutely the idea that beautiful objects necessarily set up a train of associations which suggest the power and love of the Deity.

The material universe derives its whole interest from accidental connections with the thoughts and feelings of sentient beings. . . . If all material objects were beautiful merely from our sympathy with the enjoyments and sufferings of beings like ourselves,

⁴¹ 1818 7. 1

we should not approach a step nearer the conclusion that beauty consists in suggestions of our past emotions.

We may also conclude, from a review of Wordsworth in the New York *Atlantic Magazine*,⁴² that American criticism tended to accept Alison's system as an argument against private subjective association in poetry. The critic liked Alison's catalogue and his "system raisonné of poetical psychology," and said that it is up to criticism to "study the most prevalent and most permanent associations in the circle of art whose principles philosophy may lead us to investigate." But in the same article is a protest against the "raving school of Criticism" (*Blackwood's Magazine*) which praises Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner." Apparently, then, the practical effect of Alison's theory was that it pushed back the poetic horizon far enough to let in Wordsworth's idealism, the while it excluded the new and objectionably sensual associations of Coleridge. As a theory, it was open both to radical and conservative interpretation. Its effect on Jeffrey I shall demonstrate shortly.

4. SCOTTISH CRITICISM

As the relationship between Scotch philosophy and Scotch criticism has not been studied, my remarks on the subject must be the result of only a casual examination of the criticism and of secondary sources. But some general observations can be made and must be made in view of the influence of some Scottish magazines on American criticism. Only four can be said to have had any considerable influence: the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly Review*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and Campbell's *New Monthly Magazine*, which, although it was published in London, was edited by a Scot.

Although these periodicals have been subjected to well-deserved abuse, one cannot understand the temper of the period nor the contemporary reception of the romantic poets unless he studies them. As Oliver Elton says, "They tell us what half of cultivated Britain was agreed in thinking at a

⁴² 1825. 2. 234

particular moment."⁴³ Two of them, the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, represent the political and literary conservatives; the other two give evidence of progress in literary liberalism in the third decade.

The *Edinburgh* was founded in 1802 by Francis Jeffrey and his group, "To erect a higher standard of merit and secure a bolder and purer taste in literature, and to apply philosophical principles and the maxims of truth and humanity to politics." Their taste turned out to be more pure than bold, and the fact that they thought of truth in terms of maxims needs no comment; nevertheless, their efforts marked a new era in criticism, and the reception of their work was enthusiastic. Their contribution was their method of applying the philosophy and the prejudices of the public which they represented, to new works of literature, history, and philosophy, and the result was a body of criticism judicial in method and entirely valid as far as their public was concerned. That their criticism has little intrinsic value is beside the point; they did not pretend to be writing literature. The only general and serious objection that can be made to it is that too often political considerations prevented them from applying logically their own philosophy. Local and party prejudices may sometimes be discerned in American criticism, but at no time in our period did it result in the invective which so often mars the criticism of the Scotch quarterlies.

The *Edinburgh* may best be studied in the critical work of Francis Jeffrey. At Glasgow University he studied under members of the Common Sense school. At Oxford University he became interested in criticism and wrote essays in the Johnsonian vein, one of which was an article on beauty which showed leanings toward the Associational theory. Back in Edinburgh he became a member of the Speculative Society, before which he read a paper "On Nobility" (1794),⁴⁴ which was a defense of social inequality. It is possible that he attended Stewart's course in political economy, but it is proba-

⁴³ *Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830*, I, 403

⁴⁴ Cockburn's *Jeffrey*, I, 54

ble that he found the latter's liberal attitude repulsive.⁴⁵

According to Lewis E. Gates, in his excellent study of the critic,⁴⁶ Jeffrey objected to the Lake poets because. (1) They were nonsensically mystical; (2) They falsified life by showing it through a distorting medium of personal emotion; (3) Their democratic realism was in bad taste; (4) They were pedantically earnest and serious in their treatment of art, and inexcusably pretentious in their proclamations of a new gospel of life. What he objected to in romanticism was the new gospel of life; decorative romanticism, as in Keats and Scott, he tolerated. He thought himself original in combining ethical precepts and literary criticism—in always demanding a salutary moral atmosphere in literature. After 1810, the date of publication of Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*, his method broadened, and he developed an historical point of view in criticism. Hitherto, he had never got beyond biography; now his point of view was sociological. But here he was hampered by the conviction that human nature is always the same; he could never conceive, as did Taine, of race as a force. Furthermore, he never applied the method successfully to his own age and to contemporary literature.

These facts throw light on his connection with American criticism. That he had the patrician point of view pleased our militantly Whiggish critics; and his attempt at historical criticism is reflected in our own quarterlies. His moralism and his aversion to mysticism were, of course, congenial to American thinking, as was (until the third decade) his opposition to the new gospels.

But more important was his attitude toward subjectivism in literature. He accepted, as I have pointed out, Alison's theory of association, but with interpretations of his own which made his position peculiar. In his review of Alison (May, 1811) he concluded that taste and beauty are matters of individual judgment. Yet, as a judicial critic, he could

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 51, 52

⁴⁶ *Three Studies in Literature*, N.Y., 1899, p. 21

not take that stand without modifying it. Accordingly, he decided that

As all men must have some peculiar associations, all men must have some peculiar notions of beauty, and, of course, to a certain extent, a taste that the public would be entitled to consider as false or vitiated. For those who make no demands on public admiration, however, it is hard to be obliged to sacrifice this source of enjoyment, and, even for those who labour for applause, the wisest course, perhaps, if it were only practicable, would be to have *two* tastes—one to enjoy, and one to work by—one founded upon universal associations, according to which they finished those performances for which they challenged universal praise—and another guided by all casual and individual associations, through which they might still look fondly upon nature, and upon objects of their secret admiration.⁴⁷

This is perhaps the most significant comment in the period on the relationship between the romantic poet and the conservative poet. One may see the idea in actual critical operation in Jeffrey's review of *The Excursion* (November, 1814), the famous "This will never do" article. It is apparent here that Jeffrey's opposition to Wordsworth was based simply on his belief that the poet was indulging in "peculiar" associations in which the public—Jeffrey's public—could not share. He felt that in Wordsworth's verse there were "wanton and capricious experiments on public taste," and warned him that "An habitual and general knowledge of the few settled and permanent maxims, which form the canon of general taste in all large and polished societies . . . seems necessary to the success of [genius'] exertions."⁴⁸

Here, then, in the work of a critic widely admired in America, are principles frequently seen at work in American criticism. It is the familiar demand for the "compounded note."

The *Quarterly Review*, according to a student of its criti-

⁴⁷ *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, Boston, 1854, p. 39

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 458, 459

cism,⁴⁹ had a great deal in common with the *Edinburgh* in spite of its Toryism. Like the *Edinburgh*, it was interested in preserving the power of the upper classes, and from its founding, in 1809, it kept the horrors of the French Revolution before its readers. Any book that tended to decrease the general respect for established order—for the church, laws, king, or landed aristocracy—was attacked. But since the *Quarterly* was established to oppose the Whigs, the editors sought to distinguish themselves from the *Edinburgh* by espousing ideas which the latter rejected. One result was that it took a liberal attitude toward novel ideas in literature, provided that the ideas did not threaten the economic *status quo*. It defended the Lake Poets, though that was possibly due to the circumstance that Wordsworth recanted and turned Tory, and it welcomed the literary novelities of Scott and Southey. But it attacked Shelley and Hazlitt for their radicalism. Generally its standards, as far as pure literature was concerned, were a little more liberal than those of the *Edinburgh*. In America its greatest appeal was to the *Portfolio* critics, who were in sympathy with the patrician attitude, but it was unpopular because it baited America, perhaps to help check British emigration.

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, founded in 1817, was decidedly more romantic, although it was also Tory in politics. Its moving spirit, John Wilson, praised Wordsworth's poetry and theory, liked Shelley, and was a friend of De Quincey. But this liberalism had little apparent effect on its American readers until after 1835, at which time *Blackwood's* became enormously popular here because of its startling fiction.⁵⁰ Wilson's criticism⁵¹ was derived chiefly from Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Hazlitt, and was based on the assumption that taste and feeling are the sole guides in criticism, but

⁴⁹ Walter Graham: *Tory Criticism in the Quarterly Review, 1809-1853*, N.Y., 1921.

⁵⁰ The editor of the American edition of Wilson's *Noctes Ambrosianae*, N.Y., 1854, remarked in the Preface (p. xiv) that Wilson's essays were read more in America than in England, and that there were fifty copies of *Blackwood's* in America to one in England.

⁵¹ See Ralph Colby: *John Wilson, a Study of his Writings*, 1931.

such ideas found little response in America within the period.

In one respect, however, *Blackwood's* may have influenced our critics: It adopted the principles of A. W. Schlegel, who was also well known to Americans. It is interesting to note that in 1817, the year *Blackwood's* was founded, the *Portfolio* printed a series of extracts from Schlegel's work, and that in the following year a translation of his *Lectures* appeared in a Philadelphia edition. Before 1817 there was little mention of Schlegel in any American magazine. The influence of Schlegel on Poe through *Blackwood's* has been discussed by Margaret Alterton.⁵² It is also barely possible that *Blackwood's* doctrine of the short poem, adopted from Schlegel, had influence on Bryant.

The influence of Schlegel is also apparent in Campbell's *New Monthly Magazine*, founded in 1821.⁵³ This magazine had considerable vogue in America, and was perhaps one of the greatest influences toward breaking down the old neo-classical idea of poetry as a mechanical metrical arrangement the writing of which requires care rather than genius. Campbell was strictly a product of the Scotch school, but his interpretation of Alison's theory of association was more sympathetic to individualism than that of Jeffrey. In the first article of the first number,⁵⁴ he quoted Bacon's definition of poetry as submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind, and stated that nature literally described is not poetry at all.⁵⁵ Language produces its effects by exciting fanciful associations; the poet gets his effects by "a spirited selection and concentration of truth." His conception of the nature of didacticism in poetry had many echoes in liberal American criticism. He remarked on the "subtle manner in which poetry teaches us truth through our sympathies," which, of course, was the new dynamic moralism in American criticism.

⁵² *The Origins of Poe's Critical Theory*, Iowa City, 1925

⁵³ Thomas Campbell knew Schlegel, who visited him often when he came to England. Cyrus Redding, *Literary Reminiscences and Memoirs of Thomas Campbell*, London, 1860, I, 54

⁵⁴ 1821. 1. 1

⁵⁵ The latter idea comes directly from Alison; both of them appear in an article on Byron in the *New York Atlantic Magazine*, 1824. 2. 103

His ideas on versification and diction found favor with our liberal journals. "In prose we enjoy the harmony of periods only as they pass; in verse we not only enjoy the recollection of cadences that are past but agreeably anticipate those which are coming"; and, there is no special diction in poetry: "The whole world of words ought to be at [the poet's] command." Words should be picturesque, not abstract; language loses concreteness through refinement, but poetry may revive it. After 1821 such sentiments appeared with increasing frequency in American journals, and our debt to Campbell is obvious in such magazines as the *North American Review*, Willis' *American Monthly Magazine*, and Sands's *Atlantic Magazine*. One cause of his popularity, perhaps, was his championship of Pope in the Pope-Bowles Controversy in his *Essay on English Poetry*, which was published in Boston in 1819. The more conservative American critics were pleased to see such a defense of their old favorite.

Campbell's chief influence was in the direction of greater attention to the technique of verse, and of a less obtrusive moralism. But the Scotch ideas of universal associations in poetry, of the necessity of adapting poetic genius to the capacities and limitations of the reading public, he stoutly upheld. That he, and the *Blackwood's* critics, could retain the idea and still achieve a greater liberalness in criticism, must be attributed to the fact that by the third decade, the "associations" of the popular mind had developed enough to embrace some of the formerly "peculiar" associations of the poets.

Through all of the changes in Scotch criticism, from Kames to *Blackwood's*, one dominant and shaping critical principle persists: that literature is primarily social, and that the artist must adjust his work to the desires of established society. This fact alone makes the history of the reception of romanticism in the early nineteenth century comprehensible. It accounts for the rejection of Godwin, Shelley, and Keats; for the partial acceptance of Byron, Wordsworth, and Coleridge; for the complete acceptance of Scott. And it makes clear why romanticism had a similar history in America.

IV

CRITICISM OF POETRY: SUBJECT MATTER

IN ITS JUDGMENTS of the philosophy of literature, American criticism was guided by Scottish philosophy; it took its critical philosophy from the rhetoricians, in its handling of romantic subject matter it learned from the German critics, from Wordsworth, and from Coleridge. In all three fields it molded its borrowings to its own needs and purposes. One may say in general concerning its attitude toward romantic matter that it uniformly rejected the literature of egotism. It had no patience with that sort of individualism which warred against society, and it registered a practically unanimous vote against its manifestations in Rousseau and Byron. In addition, it subjected all romantic poetry to the moral test, and to the test of economic conservatism.

It was preoccupied chiefly with three aspects of romanticism: (1) The strange, the exotic, and the distant in time and place; (2) The relationship of God and man through nature; (3) The mystical. Its interest in the first was ephemeral and often casual, and usually it was modified by considerations of art and morals. The second it found most congenial to its temperament. The third it rejected up to 1830; thereafter it was a house divided. In every instance there is observable a fascinating process by which foreign materials and ideas are subjected to the chemistry of national characteristics. American romanticism was not a duplicate of European or of English romanticism.

* * * * *

1. ROMANCE

Like the rest of the world, America was charmed by that romanticism which is a love of the strange, the distant, and the

ancient. But at the same time, the critics showed a tendency to keep a hold on reality and to insist on probability and credibility. They disliked "Gothic" wonders, and miracles, and supernaturalism. They liked always to find the glow of humanity and the solidity of real people in their romance, however ancient or far away the scene. That fact alone explains their dislike of "The Ancient Mariner." Nor would they let themselves be so beguiled as to overlook bad workmanship and slovenly technique. They were aware that the minor romantics were writing too much and too rapidly. They perceived that by 1815 the "metrical novel" had become a fad and the purveyors of the form were merely pandering to the popular thirst for novelty. By 1824, Byron, Southey, Moore, and Hunt had been displaced, in the critical hall of fame, by Wordsworth.

But their regard for the various kinds of novelty was not equal. One may distinguish, in the poetry of the first third of the century, several varieties of fictitious romance: the historical, the foreign or distant, the oriental and biblical, and the romance of the outlaw. The critics ordinarily liked historical romances of the kind that dealt with fairly familiar figures and scenes. They liked, for example, Scott's rhymed tales of Scottish history, but disliked Southey's *Roderick*, a story of eight-century Spain, because it made use of too many marvels, and medieval romance because of its morals. They liked verse about Greece and Italy, but disliked Southey's oriental fabrications. They decried the romance of the outlaw because it made crime too noble.

Their interest in all these subjects had been stimulated by the English and German historical critics. References to Percy's *Reliques* and to Hurd throughout the period suggest their influence upon American critical thought. But it was the brothers Schlegel and Madame de Staël who had most to do with American interest in the historical and national study of literature. It may be that their influence took effect partly through English criticism, for we know that Coleridge

was indebted to A. W. Schlegel,¹ and that Francis Jeffrey developed his method of historical criticism after reading de Stael's *De l'Allemagne*,² which embodied A. W. Schlegel's principles. On the other hand, there is evidence that after the War of 1812 some of our critics turned to Germany in order to undermine British influence upon our culture. Peter S. DuPonceau, one of the *American Quarterly Review* critics, led such a movement, and it was further aided by the publication of German periodicals, here and in Germany, with the purpose of promoting friendly relations between the two nations.³

Friederich Schlegel's *Lectures on the History of Literature, Ancient and Modern*, was published in translation in Philadelphia in 1818. I have found no American edition of A. W. Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* previous to 1833, but an English edition must have appeared on the American market in 1817, for it was about then that widespread discussion of the work began in American periodicals. At any rate, the writer of the preface to Friederich's *Lectures* asserted that August Wilhelm was well known in America. In 1817 the *Portfolio* printed a series of excerpts from his works,⁴ and in the same year a reviewer of the *Lectures*, in spite of his objections to Schlegel's Kantian mysticism, called the work "an epoch in the history of criticism."⁵ In 1818 the *Analectic* said that Schlegel "discovered" Shakespeare, and that Hazlitt was merely imitating him.⁶ Thereafter his influence is frequently apparent in the reviews, and by 1833 he was universally acknowledged one of the foremost living critics. In that year a reviewer of the *Lectures* said that the influence of the Schlegels on European taste was unbounded

¹ A. A. Helmholtz, "The Indebtedness of S. T. Coleridge to A. W. Schlegel," *Bull. Univ. of Wisconsin, Phil. and Lit. Series*, Vol. III, No. 4, 1907.

² Lewis E. Gates, *Three Studies in Literature*.

³ See Roy A. Tower, "Attempts to Interest Germany in Early American Literature," *Philological Quarterly*, 1928, 7, 89.

⁴ 1817, V. 4, 505, 5, 184.

⁵ *Portfolio*, 1817, V. 3, 490.

⁶ 1818, 11, 346.

and that it was generally in favor of truth, nature, and purity. "We hope ere long to see other works of the learned brothers naturalized among us."⁷ His reputation was also spread by Madame de Staël, with whom he had traveled, and who performed the larger task of familiarizing the world with German literature.⁸ Of her influence on American study of Kant there is testimony by Channing⁹ and Ticknor.¹⁰ Her *De l'Allemagne* appeared in English translation in London in 1813, and her *Influence of Literature on Society* appeared in an American edition in the same year.

The most important book in this group was A. W. Schlegel's *Lectures*, and the lessons it taught our critics were these: (1) That men must learn to perceive the beauties of alien literatures; (2) That there is beauty in the literature of all periods and countries, even in barbarous periods; (3) That the literature of the ancients had been perverted by modern, especially French, interpretations, and that men must go back to classical art itself to get at the spirit of it; (4) The distinction between "Romantic" and "Classic." The critics sometimes quarreled with the last of these, apparently because they could not comprehend some of its implications or because it approached mysticism. With metaphysical romanticism they were apt to be impatient. A. H. Everett, for instance, objected to Doering's definition of romanticism—"an infinite longing after the absolute and the infinite . . . the antique is the infinite realized in a positive shape." In reply, he said flatly that "romantic" means "fictitious," nothing more and nothing less.¹¹

On the whole, however, the critics responded to the call, and the amount of criticism of foreign and ancient literature is amazing. Many of the magazines printed series of articles on the various foreign literatures. Others, like the *North American* and the *American Quarterly*, printed long and

⁷ *American Monthly Review*, (Cambridge) 1833. 4. 14

⁸ See Emma G. Jaek *Madame de Staël and the Spread of German Literature*, N.Y., 1915

⁹ Peabody, *op cit.*, p. 75

¹⁰ *Life, Letters, and Journals*, I, 98

¹¹ *North American Review*, 1823. 16. 420-421

very scholarly reviews of foreign works. Indeed, there is perceivable an educational purpose behind the policies of some journals, as if they were conscious of a duty toward a public which was ignorant of the literature of the world. The *Portfolio* printed a series, called "Poetical Inquiries," which were purely informational essays on the literature of Arabia, Persia, China, etc., all of them from secondary sources; a series of essays on French literature, which was announced as a plan to make the subject more widely known; translations from histories of Italian literature; translations from Sismondi's *History of the Literature of the South of Europe*, which was one of the works of the Schlegel group; excerpts from Madame de Stael and Chateaubriand; and biographical essays on European writers. Robert Walsh, the Philadelphia editor, compiled a fifty-volume edition of the English poets, and, as part of his campaign for a truly American literature, printed, in his *American Quarterly Review*, many essays on the national literatures of Europe. Indeed, most of the reviews in his *Quarterly* consisted largely of histories of the subject under consideration, a method borrowed from the Scottish quarterlies.

The *North American Review* specialized in original scholarly articles on philology and historical literature, especially the German and the Italian. Boston, which was to be famous for its studies of Italian literature, had J. C. Gray as its first Dante scholar. It was Boston also that sent abroad a group of young men in the second and third decades—Cogswell, Bancroft, Prescott, Ticknor, Everett, Hedge, and Calvert—who were to teach America the meaning of modern German literature through the pages of Boston periodicals.¹² It was in the *North American* that Longfellow's early scholarly studies of European literature appeared. It was a *North American* critic—R. H. Dana—who delivered the best lectures of the period on Shakespeare, lectures which show the influence of Schlegel, Coleridge, and Lamb.

¹² See S. H. Goodnight "German Literature in American Magazines to 1846," *Bull. Univ. of Wisconsin*, No. 88, Phil. & Lit. Series, 1907, Vol. 4, No. 1.

The most representative of its scholars was W. H. Prescott, whose essays reveal the typical attitudes and prejudices of the period. Prescott learned much from the Schlegels, but frequently quarreled with them over the emotionalism and mysticism of their interpretations. He knew his subjects thoroughly and was often able to correct Sismondi on points of fact. His review of Cunningham's *Songs of Scotland*¹³ indicates the interest and the knowledge of an antiquarian, but also the Brahmin's dislike of the barbarous. He could, in his article on "Italian Narrative Poetry,"¹⁴ agree with the Schlegels that "the cold and precise Boileau" in his judgment of Tasso, "seems to have thought that beauty could wear only one form and to have mistaken the beginning of an ancient art for its principles," and yet attack Italian verse for its lack of moral or philosophical purpose. His objection to German historical criticism¹⁵ was that it showed "a taste for theories and for system-building always unpropitious to truth. . . . They carry their fantastic imagination beyond the legitimate province of the muse into sober fields of criticism." They have cold-blooded enthusiasm "which spurs them on over the plainest barriers of common sense until even the right becomes wrong," as when Schlegel, in his lectures on Shakespeare, "vindicates obvious blemishes as necessary parts of a system, and calls on us to admire, in contradiction to the most ordinary principles of taste and common sense." But, he adds, English criticism is superficial in comparison.

In Prescott's criticism we find an early expression of the attitude toward the older romantic literatures which was to become representative of America's best academic thought. In his dislike of the merely foreign and strange; in his love of the old masters—Chaucer, Cervantes, and Molière—who combined enthusiasm with deep insight and a critical attitude toward man as he exists in society, Prescott anticipates the fine criticism which Lowell wrote in the 'sixties and 'seventies. Prescott's most enthusiastic essays are those on Molière,¹⁶

¹³ 1826 23 124

¹⁵ 1839 49. 317

¹⁴ 1824. 19. 337

¹⁶ 1828 27. 372

whom he defends against A. W. Schlegel, and Cervantes.¹⁷ All this may be said also of A. H. Everett, though he was less scholar than philosopher.

But for a while American criticism exhibited a Schlegelian joy in poetry that opened up new worlds of historical glamour, though that joy was always tempered by a stricter moral judgment than the Germans exercised. That is not to say that the Schlegels were amoral. Their popularity in America was possible only because they urged that a high spirituality was a necessary ingredient in any great national literature. But the Americans were less apt to be willing to make allowances for differences in moral codes on the basis of factors of climate, national temperament, and traditions. Thus the *North American* criticized Milman's handling of antique British themes in *Samour* because he offered no opportunity for moral reflection,¹⁸ and Longfellow, though he delighted in the medieval prose romances, quoted Ascham's strictures against the morals of chivalry.¹⁹ The *General Repository and Review* liked everything about Scott's *Rokeby* except the too attractive robbers and renegades.²⁰ The *American Quarterly Review* discoursed learnedly on the poetry of the troubadours, but thought that their mingling of love and religion was unpardonable and that they were to blame for the tone of modern love poetry.²¹

Magazine criticism in Philadelphia and New York was generally less moralistic and more inclined to object to improbability and to insufficient human motivation. Bryant judged the use of biblical history in narrative verse solely by the artistic methods of the author,²² and wrote a frankly enthusiastic essay on the poetry of the troubadours.²³ The *Portfolio* said of Scott's *Lady of the Lake*, "Cold and phlegmatic criticism at such an hour may apply the scale and compasses to our feelings; may pretend to dictate when we shall be de-

¹⁷ 1837. 45. 1

¹⁸ 1819. 9. 26

¹⁹ 1833. 37. 374

²⁰ 1813. 4. 107

²¹ 1835. 17. 284

²² *New York Review and Athenaeum Magazine*, 1825. 1. 1

²³ *Ibid.*, 1. 104

lighted, to discipline the course of our smiles and tears; but 'the fit is on us, and we shake' without such instruction." The only thing the critic disliked about it was its air of "oracular mystery" which, he thought, decreased its probability.²⁴ Similarly, a *Portfolio* critic said of Scott's *Rokeby* that although medieval literature itself was crude and barbarous, in this poem the materials were properly handled.²⁵ As time went on, however, the *Portfolio* became more circumspect; discovering that historical romance was getting to be a literary fad, it began to subject the type to the "cold and phlegmatic" criticism which it had temporarily discarded.

It was very likely the success of Scott and Hogg in handling historical Scottish themes that encouraged some of the critics to demand the treatment of American scenery and history in verse. At the same time, our wars with England, naval and literary, encouraged a revolt against cultural dependence upon England.²⁶ The *North American Review* began to campaign for Americanism in poetry. In 1815 it suggested that Lydia Huntley find her themes in America.²⁷ In the following year E. T. Channing, in his essay "On Models in Literature,"²⁸ said that "the literature of a country is just as domestick and individual, as its character or political institutions. Its charm is its nativeness," a remark which, perhaps, reflects the influence of German race theories. Bryant brought up the subject again in his "Essay on American Poetry,"²⁹ and J. G. Palfrey, in his review of Eastburn's American historical poem, *Yamoyden*, discussed the richness of America as a field for verse.³⁰ One other magazine, Walsh's *American Quarterly*, followed this policy, and gave careful attention to all verse on American subjects. It cannot be said, however, that the policy of either of these magazines gave rise to indiscriminate praise of American verse. Both of them inexorably upheld their

²⁴ 1810, II. 4. 396

²⁵ 1813, IV. 2. 10

²⁶ See John C. McCloskey "The Campaign of the Periodicals After the War of 1812 for National American Literature," *PMLA*, 1935. 50. 262

²⁷ 1815. 1. 120

²⁸ 1818. 7. 198

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²⁹ 1816. 3. 202

³⁰ 1821. 12. 466

literary standards and did not hesitate to expose the faults of bad poetry. However, the problem was most fully discussed in the criticism of the novel, in which field, too, Scott supplied the inspiration. It is fairly safe to say that such influence from German literary theory as this criticism shows came through Scott. The discussion, later on in the period, of the spiritual influence of the past (exemplified in Dana's "Past and Present"³¹) appears to have been inspired by Wordsworth's philosophy.

A much-discussed type of romantic subject matter was the oriental. The impulse, apparently, came from German oriental scholarship (A. W. Schlegel conducted a journal of Sanskrit philology and edited the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Ramayana*), and from the oriental romances of Southey and Moore. The subject had several angles of interest. First, it offered materials for exotic and sensual romance, second, it was allied with biblical study and religious poetry; third, it had a relationship with some aspects of transcendentalism. With its use in romance the critics were partly charmed and partly shocked. The *Portfolio* was frankly delighted with Southey's *Curse of Kehama*, which was full of Indian gods and Indian supernaturalism, although it protested that the author put too much burden on the reader's credulity.³² The *Analectic* praised Moore's *Lallah Rookh* unreservedly.³³ Even the unitarian *General Repository and Review* praised Southey for his power and originality, though it did not think his work was permanently important,³⁴ and the New York *American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review*³⁵ found *Lallah Rookh* fascinating except for its immoral materials. "Sins and enormities," it said, "are not subjects for poetry"

But this, too, was a fad, and it soon was conquered by the American critical preference for the morally useful. In the second decade, orientalism became interesting for its biblical relationships. About 1815, Hillhouse's biblical narrative

³¹ *American Quarterly Observer*, 1833. 1 33

³² 1811 III 6. 513

³³ 1817. 10 313

³⁴ 1812. 1 444

³⁵ 1817. 1 333

Hadad, inspired very likely by H. H. Milman's works in England, started a discussion of the suitability of supernatural characters for narrative verse, and of the propriety of mixing fiction and religious fact. Bryant, in the *New York Review*, urged that the Bible was a field "as free to the poet as to the pulpit orator." But he thought the prime difficulty of this sort of material is that it is so awesome in itself that it is almost too big for the poet to handle. It is difficult also to get the reader interested in the fate of the characters because they were subject to miracles and because intimate relationship with the divine repels earthly sympathy. He pointed out, however, that Milton had overcome the difficulty in his treatment of Satan and the legendary figures of the infernal regions, and concluded that this sort of poetry is subject to the usual poetic tests. For the use of supernatural machinery there is no guide except "popular and general belief. . . . The common doctrine attributes to evil spirits an influence upon the minds of men, and it is not stepping very far out of the shadowy and uncertain boundaries of that doctrine to allow them power over matter. We shall then have no difficulty in conceiving that a fallen spirit may enter and bear about limbs abandoned of human life."³⁶ The *Christian Examiner* found *Hadad* morally wholesome, and more effective than Milman's work because Hillhouse did not dilute his story with sermons.³⁷

In this field the Schlegels and Herder both had influence, and James Marsh's translation of Herder's *Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* inspired much critical comment. The *Christian Spectator* considered the effects of the Bible on Christian poetry, and quoted Schlegel on the influence of the Bible on poetry.³⁸ A little earlier the *New England Magazine* had printed a brilliant essay on the exquisite orientalism of Hebrew poetry, praising the ease and naturalness of its style, the concreteness of its language, and its success in handling vast themes in terms of the concrete.³⁹

³⁶ 1825. 1. 12

³⁸ 1834. 6. 196

³⁷ 1825. 2. 301

³⁹ 1831. 1. 97

The influence of orientalism on the New England poets has been the subject of much scholarly study of late. One of the earliest signs of critical interest in the subject appears in Bryant's *New York Review*, which printed in 1825 a ballad, translated by Goethe, on the subject of Eastern religion. It was accompanied by an appreciative essay apologizing for oriental superstition on the ground that it is no more objectionable than classic myths.⁴⁰ Not until 1830, however, was there a perception of the connection between orientalism and Kantian mysticism. An article on "Mysticism" in Willis' *American Monthly Magazine* in that year tells of the studies of Dr. Thulock of the University of Halle, who, in 1818-1819, perused Arabic, Persian, and Turkish manuscripts. He found much "wild poetry" in them, as well as a mystical philosophy "which rivals the German one in abstruseness." The author of the article concludes with the statement that a "mystic disposition . . . is the essential prerequisite of that new and higher life which constitutes the first mystery of our religion."⁴¹ But there was not, on the whole, much interest in this subject. It was too remote from humanity, too abstruse to appeal to the American critical mind except in its more superficial romantic aspects.

A popular romantic subject of the time on which critical feeling was divided, was the deeds and passions of the outlaw, the rebel, and the criminal. A favorite subject of the "Satanic" school, it had its inception in German balladry and drama, especially that of Schiller. Essentially it was a product of the philosophy of Rousseau and of the German "storm and stress" movement. "Storm and stress" was a revolt against the sentimental rationalism and the lack of vitality of the popular philosophy of Mendelssohn, Abt, and Garve. It made heart and enthusiasm the highest law, and it insisted on experience, as against abstract generalization, as the only source of knowledge and of art. It had no patience with the didactic, and refused to falsify or idealize life for the purpose of in-

⁴⁰ 1825. 1. 165

⁴¹ 1830. 2. 296

culcating a moral lesson which seems to be in harmony with the real.⁴²

The literary result was a flood of ballads and plays about robbers and social outcasts, whose crimes and sufferings were described with the greatest sympathy. In England, such heroes were created by Byron, Godwin, and Bulwer-Lytton, and were found in history by the historical romancers. In America they appeared in such verse as Dana's *Buccaneer*. Criticism asked usually whether the treatment of the subject revealed a sympathy for revolt and whether crime and passion were proper subjects for verse. Generally, Byron was as much criticized for the morals of his heroes as he was praised for his art, and Schiller was condemned for the ethics of his robbers.⁴³ In the first two decades critical admiration outweighed moral aversion. But in the second decade there is observable an impatience with the whole Satanic school, and a revision of opinion on Byron. The *Portfolio*, which had admired Byron's work, printed in 1822-1823 three condemnatory articles,⁴⁴ including one charge of plagiarism.⁴⁵ In 1825 the *North American* reviewed him twice. The first review was by A. H. Everett, who called him the greatest genius since Pope, but who said of his moral attitude,

Lord Byron appears to have thrown off very early (if ever he felt it) the wholesome restraint which is generally imposed upon young minds by the authority of received opinions; and never to have attained any firm or distinct conception of sublime truths, which these received opinions rest on and represent.⁴⁶

The second one, written by Andrews Norton, condemned him without qualification.⁴⁷ This review was followed by one on Pinkney, one of Byron's American imitators, which shows just as little sympathy, and in the same year Pinkney was

⁴² Arthur Wald, *Æsthetic Theories of the German Storm and Stress Movement*, Chicago, 1924

⁴³ See Frederick Ewen: *The Prestige of Schiller in England, 1788-1859*, N.Y., 1932

⁴⁴ 1822. V. 14. 487; 1823 V. 16. 157

⁴⁵ 1822. V. 13. 250

⁴⁶ 1825. 20. 40

⁴⁷ 1825. 21. 300

attacked by the *New York Review* in an article concluding with the remark that readers were getting tired of Byronic dramas of guilt and passion, and of soliloquies and confessions of murderers.⁴⁸ As far as criticism was concerned Byronism in America was a thing of the past.

Thereafter romanticism in America took new paths. The critics had rejected the utterly unreal and the socially dangerous. Their attitude was best summed up by Willis' *American Monthly* in 1829.⁴⁹ A review of *Wilhelm Meister* classified romance as to action, passion, and character. The first type, represented best by the romance of chivalry, may dispense with knowledge of men, taste, and reason, and is the lowest of the three types. The second, which is represented by *The Sorrows of Werther* and the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, appeals to the sentiments and is more affecting than profound. The third depends on faithfulness to life and is the highest of the three. It would include *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, and *Tom Jones*. This view is essentially that of Everett and Prescott.

2 WORDSWORTH AND NATURE

The 'twenties had little to offer in poetic romance of character. Browning and Tennyson were yet to appear, and America was to exploit the subject in drama and fiction rather than in narrative poetry. The major figure of the period was Wordsworth, and his influence on American thought was penetrating. It was his work that vitalized American moralism into a dynamic and creative force. It was he who gave American idealism a philosophy to work with. Without him, American transcendentalism might have reached only a few minds capable of philosophic subtlety, for he prepared a common-sense and practical nation for the visions of Coleridge and Emerson. Indeed, it appears to me that many Americans understood no more of transcendentalism than they found in Wordsworth. The secret of his success was, perhaps, that he built his philosophy out of the vital portions of the Scotch philosophy and criticism.

⁴⁸ 1825, 2, 181

⁴⁹ 1829, 1, 149

Arthur Beatty, in his study of Wordsworth's sources,⁵⁰ says that his early ideas "indicate very clearly that he began his literary criticism as an adherent of the school of taste as it is represented by such writers as David Hartley, Lord Kames, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Hugh Blair, Archibald Alison, and Erasmus Darwin." He shows also that Wordsworth's philosophy developed out of the English and Scottish tradition, and that he was one of those artists who build upon the past rather than break with it. Wordsworth believed with Blair that the standard of taste is to be found in the general taste of mankind; he followed Hartley and Alison in their use of the associative principle, and built upon it his ideas of the educative powers of nature; he believed with Hartley that the standard of virtue and faith comes from God, and that it is expressed in the practice and opinions of men.

American thought has always preferred evolution to revolution, and when, in the twenties, it discovered that Wordsworth was more than an experimenter in ballads, it gave him enough attention to discover that there was nothing in his works inimical to American ideals. The first American printing of his *Ballads* in Philadelphia, 1802, made hardly a ripple. The *Portfolio* showed a mild interest and praised him occasionally, but obviously he was a novelty to that magazine, for soon it parodied him⁵¹ and then forgot him. The *Portfolio* ceased to function in the 'twenties, and the *Analectic* and Walsh's and McHenry's magazines were too aggressively classical to sympathize with him. Not until the very end of the period did the *American Quarterly Review* welcome him, but soon thereafter Philadelphia produced a Wordsworth scholar, in the person of Professor Henry Reed of the University of Pennsylvania, whose Pittsburgh editions in 1837 and 1839 did much to help Wordsworth's reputation in America.

It was Boston and New York that espoused his cause in the 'twenties. In the first decade he fared no better in Boston than in Philadelphia, but in the second he was discovered

⁵⁰ *Op cit*, p. 34

⁵¹ 1804. I. 4 257

by Bryant and by the editors of the *North American Review*. This did not happen until 1817 when the *Review* passed from the hands of the conservative Tudor to those of the young radicals, Willard Phillips and R. H. Dana. In that year Dana said that modern poetry has given us "a feeling of kindred with the very pebbles on the shore," and has taught us "that there is nothing vulgar but vice."⁵² In 1819 came his famous and fatal article on Hazlitt in which he attacked Pope and set up Wordsworth as king. In Wordsworth's work, he said, "a moral sense is given to everything, and material things become teachers of the mind and ministers of good to the heart."⁵³ Shortly thereafter, the *Review* came into the control of the more conservative Everetts, and Prescott expressed a dislike of the mysticism of the Lake Poets.⁵⁴ Two years later Gilman accused Wordsworth of a "disinclination to consult the precise intellectual tone of the average mass."⁵⁵

In 1824, on the occasion of the Boston edition of his works, the tide turned again. Greenwood, the reviewer, praised Wordsworth's "language of nature," and said, "If we have unworthily neglected this original and admirable poet, we have but followed the example of our countrymen."⁵⁶ But thereafter the cause of Wordsworthianism had to look for support to other Boston magazines and to New York. Robert Sands, in the *Atlantic Magazine*, called him a great poet, objecting only to the vexatious theory of the language of common men.

The great charm of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry is [his] passionate affection . . . towards all that is lovely and gentle and innocent and true in . . . nature. To his eyes . . . all natural forms . . . are symbolical of the high and holy truths which the Universal Mother is perpetually unfolding. . . .⁵⁷

In this period Wordsworth's greatest champion was W. E. Channing, whose "Remarks on National Literature"⁵⁸ shows the penetrating influence of that poet, though the essay does

⁵² 1817. 5. 368⁵³ 1819. 8. 276⁵⁴ 1821. 13. 468⁵⁵ 1823. 16. 103⁵⁶ 1824. 18. 356⁵⁷ 1825. 2. 434⁵⁸ *Christian Examiner*, 1830. 7. 269

not mention his name. Elizabeth P. Peabody, in her *Reminiscences* of Channing, says that he acknowledged his debt to the spiritual theology in the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge,⁵⁹ and that when he was in England Wordsworth had read to him from the manuscript of the *Prelude* concerning the educative influence of the communion with nature. He spoke of the approaching new moral world of which the Lake Poets were the prophets. That moral world he described in the "Remarks on National Literature," which was a reply to C. J. Ingersoll's materialistic eulogy of America in an oration delivered in 1823.

Poetry is useful by touching deep springs in the human soul; by giving voice to its more delicate feelings; by breathing out and making more intelligible, the sympathy which subsists between the mind and the outward universe; by creating beautiful forms of manifestations for great moral truths.

Later, in an oration of 1841, he said,

The great poet of our times, Wordsworth,—one of the few who are to live,—has gone to common life, to the feelings of our universal nature, to the obscure and neglected portions of society, for beautiful and touching themes. . . . He has revealed the loveliness of primitive feelings, of the universal affections of the human soul. The grand truth which pervades his poetry is, that the beautiful is not confined to the rare, the new, the distant,—to scenery and modes of life known only to a few. . . . Wordsworth is the poet of humanity.

But by that time, most of the Boston magazines had accepted the philosophy of Wordsworth. The *American Quarterly Observer* found in Dana's verse "Truth to nature resulting from the Poet's own free communion with her."⁶⁰ In 1830, in an attack on Scotch and Utilitarian philosophy, the *Christian Examiner* said that poetry is not magic mysticism. It embodies the universal mind, it is a reflection of our nature, it speaks "the common mind of all the world." There is poetry in real life, in humblest life. Poetry is no more

⁵⁹ p. 75

⁶⁰ 1834. 2. 151

inscrutable than our own hearts. "There is unwritten poetry; there is poetry in prose; there is poetry in all living hearts"⁶¹ Six years later, a Boston edition of *Yarrow Revisited* led Felton, of the *Christian Examiner*, to call Wordsworth one of the most remarkable reflective poets of the age.⁶² A year later, the *Christian Spectator*, which was the organ of trinitarian orthodoxy, regretted that it had neglected him, and said that it approved of his idea of the moral beneficence of nature, and of his simple style. It summed him up as the poet of humanity, of nature, and of religion. Incidentally, the *Spectator* gave evidence of the influence of the Scottish quarterlies in America when it remarked that the *Edinburgh* was responsible for Wordsworth's neglect.⁶³

The support of these various religious sects makes it obvious that Wordsworth had conquered one of the most important groups in America. He had allied poetry of a high order with religion; he had succeeded in being didactic without losing his artistic integrity. In fact, his integrity was rooted in his didacticism. American criticism seemed to sigh that here at last was what it had been looking for: spirituality without unintelligibility, vitality without sensuality, edification without didacticism, good workmanship, and finally, a type of romance satisfying to every one in that it lifted the reader above common life without taking him out of it.

When finally he conquered conservative Philadelphia through the pages of the *American Quarterly Review*, the victory was more than complete. Relieved of the classicism of Walsh and the querulous invective of McHenry, the *Quarterly* let itself go in an orgy of appreciative criticism. "It is but a few years," said a reviewer of *Yarrow Revisited* in 1836,⁶⁴ "since the name of Wordsworth was really repulsive, and though utterly ignorant of his writings, like most or all of our generation, we heard of him with disregard or dislike. A part of this feeling was undoubtedly owing to the homage we then paid to the authority and influence of the individual

⁶¹ 1830. 9. 225

⁶² 1836. 8. 127

⁶³ 1836. 19. 383

⁶⁴ 1836. 20. 66

who was lord of the ascendant in the realms of poetry [Byron?]; the rest was gathered in the usual loose way with which men receive opinions . . . There was no room in men's hearts . . . for the calm voice of a solitary and tranquil spirit. . . . He stood aloof from human interests, and thence possessed a clearer judgment of things as they occurred . . . In every mind there is something which whispers of the past, foretells the future, declares without effort how far these great elements of time bear upon the present, and that the intellect of which man boasts is only a fragment; that its powers . . . only lend the energies they receive and lengthen the line whose beginning and end is not known " The reviewer even went so far as to call his vagueness delightful.

So ended an artist's conquest of a public which thirty years earlier had either ignored or misunderstood him. The *Quarterly* was, perhaps, thinking exclusively of Philadelphia when it said that only a few years since Wordsworth had been really repulsive, although R. H. Dana also said, in the Preface to his *Poems and Prose Writings* (1833),

Why, my young friends, I well remember the time when Wordsworth—the great Wordsworth—served for little else than travesty to the wittling, smartness to the reviewer, and for a sneer to the fastidious pretender to taste. . . . But now, he who cannot relish Wordsworth is advised to betake himself to the annuals.

3. THE INFINITE

In the same preface, Dana said of Coleridge,

The man who is unable to enter into the deep things of Coleridge, though he may pass for an alert dialectician, must no longer think of dictating from a philosopher's chair. To profess to differ from Coleridge may be safe, but to profess to hold him incomprehensible, would now savour less of a profession than a confession.

It is to be noticed that Dana thought of Wordsworth as a poet and of Coleridge as a philosopher, and as the rest of the critical world seemed to agree with him in this, I have treated Coleridge separately.

But there is another reason: Coleridge was almost invariably discussed in connection with Kantian metaphysics. As poet, he was appreciated by only a few, and as critic, he was practically ignored, except by Dana and Allston. When "Christabel" was published in Boston in 1816 it attracted little attention. The *American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review* in New York took the trouble merely to reprint an abusive article from the *British Review*.⁶⁶ I have found a solitary and uncomprehending contemporary review of the *Biographia Literaria*, which was reprinted in New York in 1817.⁶⁶ In fact, his career in America paralleled his career in England.⁶⁷ There, his "Christabel" and "Kubla Khan" were universally attacked until 1828 when the tide turned, as it did in America, but it was not until 1834 that an adequate review appeared.

In America his career as a philosopher, and that of Kant as well, began in 1829 with James Marsh's Burlington edition of *The Friend*. Simultaneously the ideas of Cousin and De Gerando began to occupy the critical mind, and references to Kant were no longer merely slighting. The movement was restricted almost entirely to New England, though new editions of Coleridge's poetry in 1831 and 1835 attracted attention in Philadelphia and New York.

It was the beginning of American transcendentalism in its more abstruse manifestations. In its simpler forms it was more or less congenial to the public represented by the critics. The idea of the worth of man and of the immanence of divinity in nature and human nature had been slowly filtering into the American mind from various sources. But the intricate and involved metaphysics of the relationship between mind and the universe was a special study which was confined largely to New England. Most of America continued to adhere to Scotch realism, but in some quarters that philosophy was thought too restrictive of the spirit and of the imagination. A few thinkers came to decide, after the impact of Coleridge and

⁶⁶ 1817. 1 12

⁶⁶ *Portico*, 1817 4. 417

⁶⁷ W. J. Graham. "Contemporary Critics of Coleridge," *PMLA*, 1923 38 278

certain continental philosophers, that it contained too much of both idealism and realism to be satisfying to either the empiricists or the idealists.

The Harvard group who went to Germany brought back a knowledge of German literature but not of German philosophy. It was James Marsh who first expounded that philosophy through Coleridge. In her study of "James Marsh and the Vermont Transcendentalists"⁶⁸ Miss Nicolson says that when the Transcendental Club first met they had all been reading Marsh's edition of Coleridge. In the introductory essay to *Aids to Reflection* Marsh taught that the "Christian belief is the perfection of reason, and that reason includes both the logical faculty and intuition." It is higher than understanding, and begins where understanding ends. Believing that Locke and some of the Scottish philosophers offended reason because they neglected theology, he sought to reconcile religion and philosophy by interpreting Coleridge's thought. His criticism did much to remove from Coleridge the charge of obscurity. Marsh wrote to him in 1829, "It is in consequence of the false and superficial notions to which the world is accustomed, rather than to their inherent difficulty, that your philosophical writings have been so generally considered mystical and unintelligible." In the same letter he said that Scotch philosophy had displaced Locke in American colleges, that Kant was little known in America, and that Americans who went to Germany did not study him. He said also that he had read some of Kant, and that he was indebted to Coleridge for an understanding of him.⁶⁹

As a result of his study of metaphysics and of his editing of Herder's *Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, he concluded that modern romanticism in poetry is a reaching for the unknown and that its spirit partakes of the melancholy of Christianity. Neither of these postulates was generally accepted in American criticism, though the first found some favor in New England. Certainly, Channing did not think of Christianity

⁶⁸ *Philosophical Review*, 1925, 34 28

⁶⁹ J. L. Torrey, ed., *Remains of the Rev James Marsh*, p. 135

as melancholy. He said of Mrs. Hemans' religious verse "I have sometimes felt in reading Mrs. Hemans' works, that her sense of the evils of life is too keen, and colors her views too much. I love to be touched, moved, but not depressed."⁷⁰ One of his most frequent assertions was that unitarian Christianity leads to serene cheerfulness. Yet he was devoted to Coleridge, and "often said that he owed more to Coleridge than to any other philosophical thinker."⁷¹ The inconsistency, if it may be called that, might be attributed to the fact that Coleridge and Marsh were both trinitarians, who adhered to a theology less optimistic than that of unitarianism. It is more likely, however, that Channing was simply putting European transcendentalism through the alembic of American optimism.

That Marsh was not representative, even of New England, may be judged by the philosophical articles in the *Christian Examiner*. In 1830, a reviewer of De Gerando's *Self-Education*⁷² attacked English rationalistic and realistic philosophy for demonstrating moral truths "without applying them to our moral nature." It is too abstract, too barren of sentiment. Coleridge alone is satisfactory, but even he is too obscure for the general reader, too cold and logical.

We would see a more profound analysis of the soul, with its boundless capacities for suffering and enjoyment, its thirst for infinite good, its deep passions, its inexpressible wants, its lofty aspirations after the unseen and eternal. . . . We want a philosophy which recognizes the religious and immortal relations of the human race, those holy and spiritual relations which alone explain the secret of our present existence, or cast any light on our future destiny. . . . We do not wish them to be treated as subjects of cold, logical discussion . . . but to be held up in living colors, as everlasting realities in which every human being has a deep and vital interest.

It is clear, at the conclusion of the review, that the representative organ of radical unitarianism looked to France for this

⁷⁰ Peabody, *op. cit.*, p. 415

⁷¹ Peabody, *op. cit.*, p. 75

⁷² 1830. 7 70

In 1836,⁷⁹ the *American Quarterly Review* made amends for its neglect of him in an article which grants that he is great, yet objects to his "lack of commonality." Coleridge was "immune to the doings of the world," and though he had a fine "poetic character," he wrote little fine poetry because his imagination would not descend to details. He goes beyond the regions of common knowledge. His obscurity is the result of "delicate and indistinct associations." "His law of association was peculiar with him; he saw analogies from dwelling more minutely on his thoughts; relations . . . were familiar to him which others could not readily perceive."

This attitude was representatively American during the period, and has, perhaps, remained so. As a poet, he is today hardly more popular than he was then, except for his "Ancient Mariner" and his "Christabel." Coleridge was not conspicuously successful in crystallizing philosophical conceptions into powerful poetic expression.

That is not true of Shelley, whose neglect is one of the most interesting phenomena in American criticism. That neglect was due partly to England's aversion to him,⁸⁰ but for the most part it can be attributed to Shelley's radical political doctrines, which were repugnant to American political conservatism. At any rate, American critics failed to give him fair consideration, else they might have discovered that his poetic treatment of humanitarian philosophy was masterly. Shelley's poetry was not printed in America until 1831, when a volume of the works of Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats appeared in Philadelphia.⁸¹ The earliest criticism I have found (*Philadelphia Monthly Magazine*, 1828)⁸² expresses both admiration and perplexity. Shelley is "misunderstood here. We think him a dark and selfish unbeliever." Yet it is his own fault that he is underrated because he misused his powers. His school can never be popular. "They require too much stretch

⁷⁹ 1836. 19 1

⁸⁰ See G. L. Marsh. "Early Reviews of Shelley," *Modern Philology*, 1929.

²⁷ 73

⁸¹ J. L. Haney. *Bibliography of Coleridge*, Philadelphia, 1903

⁸² 1828. 2 245

ol mind to be followed " Their work is too obscure, too intricate. He is at his best in short lyrics; "Alastor" is the best of the long ones. An early appreciative essay appeared in Willis' *American Monthly Magazine* in 1829.⁸³ The essay is a short one, but it contains a reprint of some lyrics, expresses surprise that Shelley is unknown to Americans, and says of him, "Shelley has written as if he had never read poetry." In the same year Willis reprinted the "Skylark" and parts of "Prometheus,"⁸⁴ and in 1830 he reprinted "Adonais" with the remark that he had been trying unsuccessfully to get a volume of Keats's poems.⁸⁵ Keats received hardly so much as mention in the period.

The greatest tribute to Shelley appeared in 1836 in the *American Quarterly Review*,⁸⁶ the erstwhile guardian of conservatism. The reviewer opened with an analysis of the rise and fall of Byron in critical estimation, and then divided poetic genius into three types: the inquiring and doubting, the conservative, and the revolutionary and convulsive. Byron was the third type. He warred with man's best interests and noblest institutions. But Shelley sought reform out of a love for freedom. He was one of the few great literary men who stand well above their audience. He soared into the invisible, but only a few could follow him. He was "the poet of intellect and feeling, but not of passion in its common sense." The reviewer admitted a desire "to create an admiration and an affection for him and to deepen the interest in his writings," and to that end he printed with unerring taste parts of the best of the poems. His final judgment was that Shelley's love of the ideal was his virtue and his vice. His "remote chain of thought will give him a small but select audience."

That conclusion, so suggestive of Scottish critical principles, explains Shelley's fate in America; and the fact that a critic could give such thorough consideration to his work when obviously it was not meant for "the generality" is a sign of a new era in American criticism. Enlightened opinion was

⁸³ 1829 1. 431

⁸⁵ 1830. 2. 353

⁸⁴ 1829 1. 508, 513

⁸⁶ 1836. 19. 257

best represented by Channing, who read the "Skylark" delightedly, but thought Shelley "a seraph gone astray."⁸⁷ He said of the poet in 1828 "I received distinctly the impression that Shelley was a noble nature sadly perverted, and that under happier influences he might have proved the glory of his race."⁸⁸

Ideality in poetry and in philosophy, then, was accepted partially and with reservations in one or two sections of the country late in the period. It may be said that the critics admitted its charm, but that they were still too strongly influenced by the common sense of the older philosophers to be able to let go of everyday reality. At the same time, the new Platonism had the effect of discrediting, to some extent, the Scottish realists. To the true intellectual conservative, German transcendentalism was not a congenial philosophy; at the same time it could not be ignored as a system, for technically it was thorough and profound. Realism, on the other hand, was a compromise between the empiricism of Locke and the intuitionism of the late eighteenth-century schools, and as such it was subject to suspicion. The result was that some thinkers either adopted Platonism and Kantianism, or went back to Locke.

The best disposition of the problem by a conservative is to be found in the work of A. H. Everett. In a review of Cousin in 1829,⁸⁹ Everett made an analysis of the various systems which must have appealed to a large class of cultivated readers. He praised the Scots, but thought their work basically fallacious. They were congenial to his prejudices but they did not satisfy his reason. He found that their philosophy had reached its logical end in the work of Thomas Brown, who seemed to be returning to the skepticism of Hume. "We venture to hope that it [Brown's *Lectures*] will not long be allowed to usurp in our most respectable institutions for education, the place which was once occupied by the great master of intellectual science [Locke]."

⁸⁷ Peabody, *op cit*, p 331

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p 414

⁸⁹ *North American Review*, 1829 29 67

On the other hand, he found Kant, as an opponent of Hume, completely satisfactory. Kant's style is tedious, but his is the "best statement of idealism ever made." But Locke's doctrine really appeals to judicious men. Kant fled skepticism, but he used the obscure methods of the skeptics to achieve his idealism. His system has

. . . a wild and ethereal air about it, that catches attention and delights the fancy. It fills the mind with lofty and glorious imaginations, transports us from the cold and formal realities of the world around us into empyreal regions . . . It gratifies our longing after a nobler and a loftier destiny than that which we can here aspire to, by bringing our minds into nearer contact . . . with the sublime spirit whose energy pervades and governs the universe. It lends itself easily to all the beauties of rhetorical embellishment, and when it appears in its natural dress, always wears the seductive graces of an elegant style. Its professors are the inspired prophets. . . But when we come to a close survey of the doctrines of the idealists, we find that, as they are animated by the spirit of poetry, so they share the faults to which it naturally leads. They are too apt, like that "sweet seducer of youth" to accommodate "the shows of things to the desires of the mind," rather than to the reality of sober fact. Their doctrine is vague, undefined, and somewhat difficult to come at in strict detail.

This utterance may be considered as the essence of American critical thinking in the first third of the century: Be charmed by poetry and philosophy, if you will, but never lose touch with the reality of sober fact.

journals even after that. The *Portfolio* printed articles attacking innovations in diction;¹ a series of minute dictional criticisms on Gray's "The Bard";² an attack on Barlow for "taking liberties" with words,³ letters about "spurious" words;⁴ an attack on Scott for adulterating the English language with foreign words.⁵ It even disliked archaic words in the poetry of Scott.⁶ Of particular interest here is the war between the *Portfolio* and Noah Webster on the subject of American English.⁷ The *Portfolio*, in the person of J. S. J. Gardiner, thought that the language should be kept perfectly pure in America, and to that end published several satirical articles on the "American" language.⁸ Later the *North American Review* took up the subject in articles about John Pickering and Noah Webster, and in his "Essay on American Language and Literature."⁹ Walter Channing declared that we should not have a literature of our own until we had our own language. Although the critics did not apply their arguments to poetry, the controversy led eventually to Lowell's great defense of native idiom in his Preface to the second series of the *Biglow Papers*.

After 1810 discussions of dictional purity were few. The critics were now concerned with two other neo-classical criteria—clarity and dignity. The first of these is not easy to deal with. The insistence on clarity was universal, but often it is difficult to tell whether the critics were objecting to obscure diction or to vague subject matter. The general tone of criticism was set by the Scotch rhetorics, which ruled uncompromisingly that clarity comes before beauty. But the rhetoricians themselves had encouraged a kind of obscurity by their preference for abstract diction. Burke, for instance, had declared, and others agreed, that words may affect without raising images, and that the sublime is essentially obscure.

¹ 1801. I. 1. 42

² 1809. III. 1. 59

³ 1815. IV. 6. 67

⁷ See Ellis' *Dennie*, p. 147

⁹ 1815. 1. 307

² 1806. II. 1. 145, 161, 177, 305

⁴ 1814. III. 3. 345, 4. 83

⁶ 1813. IV. 1. 557

⁸ 1806. II. 1. 38, 86

One can only conclude that their notion of clarity was based partly on the universal familiarity with the old "poetic diction" and partly on purely mechanical matters of syntax. In early romantic poetry there was a great deal of slovenly sentence structure, and American critics took pains to try to correct it. This was especially true of the critics of the old school—those of the *Portfolio*, the *American Quarterly Review*, and the *Philadelphia American Monthly Magazine*—but even here there was a tendency, as time went on, to pay less attention to matters of mechanical detail. The most notable of this group was Dr. McHenry, the immigrant Irishman, whose criticisms in the *American Quarterly Review* and in his own *American Monthly Review* were one long protest against all romantic poetry. Typical of his work are the articles "American Lake Poetry,"¹⁰ in which we are told that the poetry of Willis and Bryant contains "epithets without meaning," and "The Decline of Poetry."¹¹ One may estimate his critical keenness by the circumstance that he found "mystifying" Willis' line, "Fine pencillings of light beneath the spreading trees."

The discussion of the "dignity" of poetic diction was based on Wordsworth's controversial theory of the language of common life, which was contradictory to the dictum of the rhetoricians that poetry is degraded by "low," "mean," or "trivial" expressions. By 1824 Wordsworth had won, but he won in spite of his Preface. It is probable that the new diction would have become established much sooner if Wordsworth had not quite so frankly contradicted what everybody had been taught to believe.

During the first two decades the magazines attacked him. It is true that the *Lyrical Ballads* were reprinted in Philadelphia in 1802, and that the *Portfolio* printed some excerpts, but no other works of Wordsworth were printed in America until 1824.¹² The *Portfolio*, in 1809, accused him of mistaking

¹⁰ *American Quarterly Review*, 1832. 11 154

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1834 15. 448

¹² Annabel Newton *Wordsworth in Early American Criticism*, Chicago, 1928

"silliness for simplicity."¹³ The *Analectic* reprinted an attack on his "Peter Bell,"¹⁴ and Dr. McHenry, of course, called him "prosy" and reiterated his belief that prose is the language of common life for conveying ideas, and that verse is an artificial construction of sentences for harmony or elevation.¹⁵

Nevertheless Wordsworth's influence gained, and it was due more to him than to anyone else that American criticism changed its ways of thinking about diction. Professor H. H. Clark has tried to show that deism was responsible for such concrete nature description as is to be found in Freneau's verse,¹⁶ but the influence of deism is not demonstrable in the criticism of poetry during our period. And if, as he says, "deism evolved into Unitarianism," the early unitarian critics did not show the friendliness to Wordsworth which might have been expected. The unitarian *Literary Miscellany*, published in Cambridge in 1805-1806, attacked not only deism,¹⁷ but Wordsworth, declaring that his theory was a failure and that his ballads "corrupt the heart by unnatural simplicity, and weaken the head by false representations of poetical beauty."¹⁸

Nevertheless it was in Boston that he appears first to have influenced the critics. William Tudor, of the *North American Review*, accused his school, in 1816, of lacking discipline,¹⁹ but in the same year E. T. Channing wrote an article pleading for greater freedom of the imagination and less dependence on the classics, which he headed with a verse from Wordsworth.²⁰ In 1817 Dexter criticized Pierpont²¹ for using too many classical allusions, and another critic attacked a poet for his "loose and general descriptions" and for referring to objects as a class rather than as things.²² In 1823²³ Gilman

¹³ 1809 III 1. 256

¹⁴ 1819. 14 304

¹⁵ *American Monthly Magazine*, 1824. 1. 97

¹⁶ *Poems of Freneau*, New York, 1929, p. xlvii

¹⁷ 1805. 1 45, 117, 212

¹⁸ 1806 2 371

¹⁹ 1816 3 273

²⁰ 1816. 3 202

²¹ 1817 4. 414

²² 1817. 5. 224

²³ 1823 16. 108

praised Percival for his ability to weave into verse the names of common and vulgar objects, and to overcome "the repulsive or unpoetical associations attached to such words and invest them with an unwonted dignity and purity."

At about this time there is apparent an increased interest in Wordsworth. His *Poetical Works* were published in four volumes in Boston in 1824, upon which occasion the *North American*²⁴ apologized for America's neglect of the poet, saying that only the *Lyrical Ballads* had previously been published in this country, and that "the man who has done more than anyone living to restore to poetry the language of feeling, nature, and truth, remains unread." This interest was partly due to the influence of Campbell's *New Monthly Magazine*, which had espoused the new diction, and which was becoming popular in America, and partly to Wordsworth's American disciple, W. C. Bryant. Bryant's friends on the *North American* staff, R. H. Dana and Willard Phillips, had been friendly to romanticism from the beginning, but when Bryant went to New York he carried with him a love of Wordsworth which soon became apparent in the magazines of the Knickerbockers. In 1824 there appeared in the *Atlantic Magazine*²⁵ a long article which is one of the finest early appraisals of Wordsworth. In the *Atlantic's* successor, the *New York Review and Atheneum Magazine*, which was edited by Bryant, the influence of Wordsworth is pervasive. One critic referred to neo-classical diction as "The Cant of Poetry—a set of conventional phrases, formerly called poetic diction . . . now laid aside."²⁶

By 1833 the battle against neo-classical diction was won, for even the conservative magazines had capitulated. In Boston, the *American Monthly Review*, the *New England Magazine*, and the *Christian Examiner* were beginning to make the *North American Review* look conservative. Critics now insisted on Anglo-Saxon downrightness, on concreteness, simplicity, and condensation. They had by now discovered that

²⁴ 1824. 18. 356

²⁵ 1824. 1. 334, 419

²⁶ 1825. 1. 289

the language of the Bible was such as Wordsworth had pleaded for, and that universal moral conceptions were best described in terms of the concrete. Thus a critic in the *New England Magazine*²⁷ praised the ease, naturalness, and concreteness of Hebrew poetry which was the more remarkable because its themes were vast and intellectual. In that year, too, there appeared an American edition of an English "rhetoric" which set forth Wordsworth's theory of diction, urged plain straightforwardness in diction, and declared that poetry is written for the eye, as contrasted with prose, which deals with the abstract. This was James Montgomery's *Lectures on Poetry, Literature, etc.* (New York, 1833); the fact that it was published in Harper's Family Library is testimony of its popular appeal.

But concreteness and plainness were only half the battle. The other half was the poet's right to describe, in metaphor and simile, what he saw, rather than what the rest of the world was used to seeing. Simplicity and concreteness, after all, were aids to clarity, which was one of the *desiderata* of classicism. Suggestiveness and extreme subjectivity was another matter. It meant a readjustment between the artist and his audience, a willingness on the part of the reader to see things through the eyes of poets who no longer would see only what they were supposed to see. It meant, furthermore, that the poet expected the reader to find beauty in his metaphors as metaphors. Most of Kames's and Blair's rules were obviously based on the supposition that description is a means, not an end; that poetry is written primarily to express universal sentiments, to teach, or to tell a story. The modern idea of images for their own sake had not yet been born in the world of criticism. But a critic in the *Analectic* saw the point when he said that there were two schools of poets—those who used simile and metaphor for adornment only, and the "metaphysical" poets who used them as subjects.²⁸

Blair and Kames had said, reasonably enough, that images are created by passion, and had insisted on naturalness, pro-

²⁷ 1831. 1. 97

²⁸ 1817. 9 245

priety, and logic in the use of figure. But in codifying the various kinds of figure they perpetuated the rather mechanical handling of imagery that was characteristic of eighteenth-century verse. More unfortunate—for the nineteenth century—however, was the codification, in Kames and Alison, of the normal “associations” of various objects. For figure is a matter of association, and to think of association, as did Kames, as static and unchanging—as universal rather than individual—was to keep poetry in its old channels and to discourage new and original reactions. It did not matter that Alison had urged the essential subjectivity of associations. It did matter that he had thought of associations as more or less uniform in their operation in human taste.

The general rule of criticism in this period was that associations must be general and universal, and the reviewers had ample authority for it. The Scotch philosophers had agreed that there is an objective reality which is perceived directly by the senses and comprehended by the understanding. The earlier moralists had found that the moral and æsthetic senses worked alike in all men. Kames had unfolded “those principles that ought to govern the taste of every individual.” Blair had analyzed those beauties “which have been found to please mankind generally.” All philosophy and æsthetics agreed on the essentially social nature of art and morals, and the idea found coherent form in the theory of associations.

The very word was a commonplace of criticism, but it was used conservatively or liberally, according to the nature of the critic. McHenry, for instance, attacked the “Lakers” for “dragging forth hidden resemblances” and making “forced associations.” The *Analectic* found that association was responsible for both bad taste and the grandest pleasures of the imagination.²⁹ The *American Quarterly Review* attributed Coleridge’s obscurity to delicate and indistinct association.³⁰ Prescott settled the Pope-Bowles controversy to his own satisfaction by deciding that objects of art and objects of

²⁹ 1814. 3. 356-357

³⁰ 1836. 19. 23

nature are both poetical according to their associations.³¹ A critic in the *Atlantic Magazine* attacked *Blackwood's* for praising the "Ancient Mariner," with the warning that critics must study "the most prevalent and permanent associations in the circle of art whose principles philosophy may lead us to investigate."³²

Generally, then, the doctrine was used to restrict individualism. But it offered ample justification for the individualism of the liberal critics, and some of them comprehended the principle upon which the romantic mind worked. They saw that it was possible to describe an object by recording one's reactions toward it. The idea was not a new one, but never before had it assumed such importance in poetic theory and practice. The critics recognized the danger of the "pathetic fallacy," but some of them were willing to accept the danger with the benefits.

Perhaps the earliest recognition of—and protest against—the idea is to be found in the *Portfolio* in 1813³³ when a reviewer attacked R. T. Paine for his "stretching of analogy." He characterized Paine's method as a "resemblance of sympathy excited by different objects rather than any essential resemblance between the objects themselves." The first critic to welcome the principle was Willard Phillips of the *North American Review*. In a review of Cowper he said, "To judge rightly of an author, we must view objects from the position assumed by himself or that occupied by the generality of his readers. Unless we take the station at which the artist has sketched the landscape we shall in vain look for a resemblance to the real scene. . . . Thus, in estimating the pictures of men and things drawn by a poet, we must take into consideration the relation of the writer and the character of the readers for whom the production is intended."³⁴ A year later, Phillips developed the idea further in a review of Byron. Byron's poetry, he said, is a journal of himself. You see more of the writer than of his theme.

³¹ *North American Review*, 1821. 13 451

³² 1825 2. 339

³³ 1813. IV. 1. 441

³⁴ 1816. 2. 235

In Burns, Cowper, and Thompson, we see woods and fields and streams with precisely those emotions which the objects themselves produce; in Byron we are always reminded that we are looking through a medium and are assuming the impression of another, instead of yielding ourselves to our own. . . . Thus the most ordinary objects, sketched in the most hasty and careless manner, may be the basis of original and brilliant poetry.³⁵

It is to be noted that Phillips admits of "universal" associations the while he admires individual ones.

The discussion continued into the next decade. In 1823 Prescott, more conservative than Phillips, came to the conclusion that drama was languishing because in the modern poets the pervading and animating principle is egotism. "Winkelmann observes that the poetry of the North, though rich in imagery, furnishes few images for the pencil of the artist" because in modern verse real objects are wrapped up in the author's fancy, "exhibiting only the hues of individual sentiments. It is the method of description rather than the object which excites, and whereas this means interesting poetry, it is fatal to the drama."³⁶ The *Atlantic Magazine*, quoting Bacon's "submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind," remarked concerning Byron, "The moment description becomes technically accurate, it ceases to be poetry at all,"³⁷ and the *United States Literary Gazette*³⁸ approved of Byron's method but thought it more difficult for the poet to get the reader's sympathy through his secret feelings than through objective description.

By the third decade, then, some of the critics had assimilated the principle of subjectivity in description and approved of it. Perhaps the best statement of the average liberal critic's stand on the matter appeared in a review of Bryant in the *American Monthly Review* (Boston).³⁹ After praising Bryant's universal intelligibility, the critic says

. . . besides a delicate, minute delineation of what is most obvious, he may give to them all [natural objects] what we have never

³⁵ 1817 5. 103

³⁶ 1823. 16. 145

³⁷ 1825. 2. 103

³⁸ 1824. 1. 65

³⁹ 1832. 1. 300

done; the common property has come into his hands to be invested with qualities, uses, associations, which an original and glowing mind honestly sees to become it and belong to it. . . . There is not the slightest attempt to force upon it unnatural virtues or relations, or to connect it with feelings to which it could not have given birth.

This, it seems to me, is a remarkably successful solution of a problem which had vexed critics for three decades.

Two critics deserve separate mention. Richard Henry Dana, the elder, the most militant romantic on the staff of the *North American*, said of Pope in his article on Hazlitt:⁴⁰

His words are never pictures, nor are there ever any poetical attachments or associations connected with them. They move you no more than the sing-song music of his metre. His words are cold abstractions, and there is often a loose, unphilosophical use of them which ought not to be tolerated even in prose.

Such remarks would have passed unnoticed ten or fifteen years later. In 1819 they were taken as an insult to the general taste. In a review, in 1828, of Pollok's *Course of Time*, Dana said.

The ornamental terms are well-nigh used up, and the poet nowadays must trust almost solely to the happy combination of the simplest words. . . . But the simple terms of our language never can grow old. . . . Wordy indefiniteness is the vice of the age, and people read on, page after page, vaguely pleased with a certain flicker and show of things, without having seen one simple and clear image, or having one simple and clear thought.⁴¹

But whereas Dana was an outspoken rebel, his friend Bryant was an enlightened child of the Scottish tradition. His "Lectures on Poetry," delivered in New York in 1825, show his indebtedness to Alison in the matter of association, and to Burke in that he thought of poetry not as a strictly imitative art but one in which words suggest both the object and the association. But his general remarks in Lecture I, "The Nature of Poetry," are the best comment on diction to be

⁴⁰ 1819 8. 276

⁴¹ *Spirit of the Pilgrims*, 1828. 1 523

found within the period. Poetry, he says, is a suggestive art, and words depend for their vividness and clearness of impression upon the mind to which they are presented. (In this belief in the duty of the reader to the poet, he and Phillips were almost alone.) Language is limited and imperfect; yet poetry owes her magic to these limitations.

The most detailed of her descriptions, which by the way, are not always the most striking, are composed of a few touches; they are glimpses of things thrown into the mind; here and there a trace of outline; here a gleam of light, and there a dash of shade. But these very touches act like a spell on the imagination, and awaken it to greater activity, and fill it, perhaps, with greater delight than the best defined objects could do. . . . Poetry is that art which selects and arranges the symbols of thought in such a manner as to excite it most powerfully and delightfully.

Like Blair and Kames, he insisted on the necessary connections between imagery and emotion, but the most profound influence on him was that of Wordsworth, who made him see that "most of the offenses against good taste are to be traced to the absence of emotion." The poems fullest of imagery, he says, are sometimes ineffective because the images

. . . are not naturally suggested by the object, not poured forth from a mind warmed and occupied by it; but a forced fruit of the fancy, produced by labor, without spontaneity or excitement. . . . The language of passion is naturally figurative, but its figures are only employed to heighten the intensity of the expression; they are never introduced for their own sake.

2. VERSIFICATION

American criticism of poetic form had three general tendencies: (1) Resistance against formlessness and lack of discipline; (2) Refusal to accept the rigidity of Augustan rules; (3) Inability to grasp some of the subtleties of romantic rhythms and forms

At its most conservative, it rebuked any variations from regularity not sanctioned by the practice of Pope; at its most

liberal, it discarded the authority of rule and usage and appealed merely to "the good ear." It opposed the excesses of the minor Romantics; but its tendency was to ignore the subject entirely as the period advanced and more important problems of content and diction arose. To the possibilities of subtly managed rhythms it seemed to be either blind or indifferent; and one is often given the impression that it thought versification unimportant in comparison with poetic content. In fact, there is perceivable an almost overt distrust of metrical beauties, as if they might lead to an æsthetic interest inimical to didactic purpose. The fear was justified, if we may judge the poetical product and criticism of Poe. There is, in the period, no person or group comparable to Poe in the criticism of technique. Bryant, who had the most to offer, did little more than to confirm or revise ideas which had long been in practice. Of the magazines, the best ones in this department were the *Portfolio* and the *North American Review*.

As in other fields, American critics tended to follow the Scotch rhetoricians rather than the earlier dogmatists. Blair and Kames, adhering to their usual method of discovering laws rather than making them, had agreed on the supremacy of the pentameter line; on the necessity for formal cesura in both blank verse and heroic verse; on the propriety of rhyme for light, gay subjects, and of blank verse for sublime subjects. They had classified verse forms according to the kinds favored by their contemporaries, and therefore offered no guidance for critics on the subject of the sonnet, the octo-syllabic couplet, blank verse of uneven length, and other romantic forms. Both had insisted on the necessity for "harmony," but neither offered suggestions for how to achieve it except through "smoothness" (i.e., regularity) of rhythm, and arrangement of pauses.⁴² Finally, they both tended to think of rhythm as an

⁴² Kames, it is true, suggested that the middle vowels—e, a, o—were the most pleasing, and that long and short syllables should be alternated. These suggestions are evidence that he recognized some hitherto neglected principles, but they tend more to constrict the creative metrist than to inspire him. At any rate, they had no apparent effect on anybody.

artificial arrangement of stress and pause, rather than as an organic and inevitable cadence produced by emotion

Now these "rules" were, for the most part, innocuous. They could do no worse than confirm the conservative in his way, and leave the forward-looking unsatisfied. Their greatest value lay in their insistence on discipline; their greatest fault was that they were not fundamental enough. The Scots subscribed, for instance, to the ancient fallacies concerning cesura, and tended to consider it synonymous with regularity. Nor did they recognize the principle of interplay between line rhythm and sentence rhythm. The idea that English metre was, historically, a matter of regularity of beat rather than of syllable-counting, never occurred to them.

For reactionary criticism in versification, we may, as usual, look to some of the southern magazines and to Dr. McHenry. Here the idea of the supremacy of the heroic couplet still prevailed. Indeed, even the liberal journals and critics seemed to regret its departure. The *Portico* consistently held to the idea that the heroic couplet is best for narrative; and it attacked any poet who indulged in run-on lines. Dr. McHenry, in his *American Monthly Magazine* and in his reviews for the *American Quarterly Review*, simply measured all verse with the Popeian yardstick. He may best be judged by his article on "What Is Poetry" in the former,⁴³ wherein he agrees with Dr. Johnson's definition of poetry as "metrical composition," and argues that its distinguishing characteristic is not passion but "structure of language."

Ordinarily, however, the conservative critic was willing to abide with Blair and Kames, and to divide his allegiance between blank verse and heroic verse. Here he followed another Scotch precept—the necessity for congruity between matter and technique. The *North American Review*, for instance, declared that versification should vary with the subject, and that the heroic couplet is best for reflective material:

It is the object of the poet, while he suggests noble and affecting images, to clothe them in numbers whose mechanical effects shall

⁴³ 1824, 1, 479

prepare the reader for their reception. . . . Versification should vary with the subject . . . and where that is of too intellectual and abstract a nature to be followed by simple intonation, the most that verse can do is to play an accompaniment that shall harmonize with the general tone of the sentiment . . . For subjects of this kind, the monotony of plain heroic verse is peculiarly adapted, because the ear soon becomes accustomed to it, and we lose in its unwearied smoothness all thought that would interfere with the current of our feelings.⁴⁴

Usually, the conservative insisted on "harmony," or smoothness and regularity of flow, as the standard in judging versification. This attitude is not to be confused with that of the critics who disliked mere carelessness of versification even though they did not insist on regularity. It is perfectly understandable, for example, that one and all should have been disturbed by J. G. Percival's undisciplined versification, though perhaps they would not have attacked him quite so vigorously had he not openly and specifically defended his neglect of art in the preface to his *Prometheus*, Part II, (New Haven, 1822). This remarkable document anticipates Whitman's pronouncements concerning the need of a free poetic technique in American poetry, and the critics' objection to it is all the more interesting in the light of Lowell's attack on the poet in the *North American Review* in 1867. Thus, Percival:

There has been a standing law of sober criticism for two thousand years.—Write much, if you please, but keep it long, and prune it well. I must confess I do not relish this mode of writing by the rule of subtraction. I had rather publish what was thrown hastily from the mind, than reduce it by laborious correction from forty to four. I do not like that poetry which bears the mark of the file and the burnisher. I like to see it in the full ebullition of feeling and fancy, foaming up with the spirit of life, and glowing with the rainbows of a glad inspiration. It would be a mournful task to distil off the *vivida vis*, that comes out only in the moments of happy excitement, and reduce the living materials to a *caput mortuum* of chaste and sober reason. When there is a

quick swell of passion, and an ever coming and going of beauty, as the light of the soul glances over it, I could not have the heart to press it down to its solid quintessence. This would do if poetry was meant to be a string of proverbs moving on, in the rank and file of couplets. . . . Again, I contend that this free and careless style is the natural one for a dawning national literature. . . . The public does not regard authors sufficiently to warrant them in giving months and even years to perfecting a few hundred lines.

The critical opposition to these ideas was, of course, almost unanimous. They represented the extreme of license, but the other extreme was to be found in the critics who had not advanced beyond the stage of syllable counting and cesura measuring. Dr. McHenry, for instance, refused to admit the legitimacy of an occasional trisyllabic foot in iambic verse, and in his article on "American Lake Poetry"⁴⁵ suggested that Bryant should have used the word "beauteous" rather than "beautiful" because the latter contained an extra syllable. McHenry thought this mere poetic slovenliness, blamed it on Wordsworth's *Excursion*, and felt that even though it was to be found in Milton it was not justifiable.

Apparently he was familiar with Bryant's essay "On the Use of Trisyllabic Feet in Iambic Verse."⁴⁶ In this essay Bryant said nothing very new or daring. He merely pointed out that the use of extra syllables had been justified by the practice of all the great English poets, and had been common ever since the Middle Ages. Mild as these claims are, the essay is valuable as a formal recognition, by a responsible and academic critic, of a liberalizing principle. If it seems tame to us, it is because we fail to realize how late neo-classical principles lingered among the orthodox. One may get an idea of this survival by reading Bryant's enraged reply to Robert Walsh, whose *American Quarterly Review* had reviewed Bryant's *Poems* in 1832. The poet called him a syllable counter and a literary quack.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *American Quarterly Review*, 1832. 11 154

⁴⁶ *North American Review*, 1819 9 426

⁴⁷ Godwin *Life of William Cullen Bryant*, I, 235

I wish the critics of poetry in this country understood a little more of the laws of versification. The tune of

"Rūm ti, rūm ti, rūm ti, etc."

is easily learned, but English verse not only admits but requires something more. He who has got no further than rūm ti knows no more of versification than he who has merely learned the Greek alphabet knows of Greek. Yet people undertake to talk about the rules of English prosody who are evidently utterly ignorant of the usage, the established usage, of the great mass of English poets who deserve the name. I have half a mind to write a book in order to set our people right on this matter, but I fear nobody would read it.⁴⁸

Even Willard Phillips, the most liberal critic of the day, could say, concerning Bryant's verse, "Whether these [run-on lines and trisyllabic feet] are beauties or defects is hardly worth the inquiry in such a production where they are buried and lost in so much that is great and superlatively beautiful,"⁴⁹ though perhaps the reservation was a sop to a conservative public rather than an expression of his opinion.

One of the most perplexing problems to the orthodox was the then much used octosyllabic couplet. Because of Scott's *Lady of the Lake*, said Goodrich,⁵⁰ "All young poets were inoculated with the octa-syllabic verse," and the fad sent the critics scurrying back to their rhetorics. Primarily their objection was founded on a love of the old ten-syllable line, and on the similarity of the new mode to what they called the "ballad" style. Byron gave them support when he referred to its "fatal facility," but there is occasionally discernible a dislike of rhyme as a frivolous ornament. In 1804 an article appeared in Brown's *Literary Magazine and American Register* attacking rhyme as a defect,⁵¹ and as late as 1815 the *Portfolio* found it fitting to print what was, in effect, an apology for rhyme,⁵² in which the author pleaded that though our reasoning is in favor of blank verse, our tastes are

⁴⁸ Letter to Dana, *Ibid.* I, 276

⁴⁹ *North American Review*, 1821 13 383

⁵⁰ *Recollections of a Lifetime*, II, 100

⁵¹ 2. 403

⁵² 1815. IV 6. 371

in favor of rhyme. After giving Dr. Johnson credit as the first defender of rhyme, he argued that the recurrence of rhyme affords sensual pleasure, that the early English poets were bad rhymers because they did not try hard enough; that Shakespeare was a wretched rhymers; that frequently rhyme was used as a blind for emptiness; and concluded that rhyme is a valuable improvement.

The *Portico* was somewhat less naive in a review of Scott,⁵³ in which it said, "No English poem of considerable length can please long that is not written in the heroic measure. The style of ancient ballads, the offspring of rude invention, is ill-fitted to delight the fastidious taste of modern readers." The four-foot line makes Scott a mere rhymster; it does not afford room for bold expression. "The rhyme too often breaks in upon the sense and tires the ear by satiety of music. No measure is so suitable to narrative as the heroic." For the same reason, the Spenserian stanza is objectionable. "I am convinced that the sooner our fashionable poets renounce these redundant trappings of rhyme, the sooner will they attain that immortality . . ." Even Dana, in the preface to his *Poems* (1827), said that the octosyllabic measure was monotonous unless it contained variations, and that Scott alone had used it well.

More convincing, however, is the *Portico's* argument against the ballad style in a review of Thomas Brown's *Paradise of Coquettes*.⁵⁴ The critic's complaint was that the ballad style is so lively that it corrupts classical serenity. Here, very likely, is the nub of the matter. The critics were conscious of the growing popularity of the "novelties"—the oriental and medieval rhymed tales which were so lively that the older, graver, and heavier epics could no longer retain the favor of the public. Thomas Brown, who was one of the Common Sense philosophers, voiced, in the preface to his book, regrets with which his critic felt full sympathy. He knows, he says, that he is out of harmony with the taste of the period; that the really popular mode is the ballad, which is characterized

⁵³ 1816 1 331

⁵⁴ 1816 1. 361

by abruptness of transition and minuteness of detail. Imperfect metres pass unchallenged in the metrical tale because of its resemblance to the old popular ballads in which smoothness is not expected. This, says Brown, corrupts the public taste. The subject matter is so delightful that readers forget art!

Some of the magazines, however, yielded to the popular cry and accepted the metrical novel in octosyllabic couplets. The *Analectic*, apparently accepting Scott's versification because it loved his philanthropy, admitted that although the couplet was unsuitable for the solemn epic, it was good for rapid narrative,⁵⁵ and the average literary weekly which had no very definite standards accepted all of these productions as they came out with as little concern for æsthetic questions as the average modern weekly literary review shows regarding the standard popular novel.

In time the fad of long ballad-narratives died out, and the problem ceased to be discussed. But of ever increasing importance was the discussion of the technique of blank verse. It is in this field that the critics performed a real service, for they insisted on a discipline which many poets were too willing to discard in the name of the new freedom. Here the critics worked in perfect harmony with Blair and Kames, both of whom insisted that blank verse and heroic verse were subject to the same rules, both calling for regular cesura and metre. The more conservative American critics went further and called for even greater rigidity and regularity of metrical structure in blank verse. But on the whole the critics accepted the position which Bryant took in both practice and theory: that blank verse calls for a heavily accented syllable at the end of the line. In a review of the *Ruins of Palestine*⁵⁶ Bryant pointed out that to ignore this principle is to destroy the distinction between verse and prose, and that extra syllables at the end of the line are bad because they are unexpected, and are allowable only in dramatic poetry, where natural

⁵⁵ 1816 8 120

⁵⁶ *North American Review*, 1824. 19. 42

speech must be approximated. The reasons behind the rule are faulty, in modern opinion, and are, in a sense, a reflection of Bryant's neo-classicism in so far as they imply a purely mechanical difference between prose and verse. Even so, he was more liberal than Edward Everett, who insisted on medial cesura,⁵⁷ and Henry Ware, who thought that Percival took too great care to conceal the structure of his blank verse. Only short sentences with many pauses, he said, would differentiate it from prose.⁵⁸ That is what another reviewer in the *Philadelphia Monthly Magazine* meant when he said that Percival's verse was poetry only to the eye, and turned a passage of it into prose to prove it.⁵⁹

In the beginning of our period some of the magazines revealed a surprising tolerance for blank verses of unequal length. In 1812⁶⁰ the *General Repository and Review*, a unitarian organ, called Southey an eminent and original poet, who confounded the critics and their rules, and said that the free verse of varying lengths which he used in the *Curse of Kehama* was "suitable." The *Portfolio* also accepted the method in a review of the same book,⁶¹ and in 1813 it praised Southey's variety of verse-length and cadence.⁶² But the *Portfolio* went further. In the same review it said that although ten-syllable blank verse was the natural medium for English verse, Southey's and Scott's experiments with blank verse of unequal lengths were valuable because the method meant less sacrifice of sound and sense (here it gave in a footnote an example of orthodox blank verse in which one or two words were isolated at the beginning of a line because the count would not permit them to come at the end of the preceding line), and because it made possible a better correlation between the movement of verse and the poet's emotion. Obviously the critic did not grasp the whole idea of free verse, but at least he had some conception of its advantages. It is regrettable that criticism did not develop the idea further,

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1821. 13. 227

⁵⁸ 1828 1. 65

⁶¹ 1811 III. 6. 513

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1826 22 331

⁶⁰ 1. 444

⁶² 1813 IV. 2 16

but apparently the subject was dropped for the rest of the period.

As to form in its larger sense, our critics had little that was specific to offer. Wholeness, completeness, they asked for always, but they had little conception of the problems of form which romanticism had engendered. Of Schlegel's idea of emotional unity taking the place of formal unity they were apparently ignorant; but they perpetuated the principles of formal unity. For the most part, they seemed too bewildered by the materials of the new poetry to think very much about helping to shape it.

The new metrical novel they accepted because at least it resembled the older formal epic, though the *Portfolio* regretted the passing of the epic, saying that it had been killed by modern philosophy: the Deity and the heavens were no longer possible as subjects because the modern poet found in them no room for exaggeration.⁶³ But in 1815 it criticized Scott for making the *Lord of the Isles* a metrical novel rather than an epic, and deplored the un-epic levity of style with which it was written.⁶⁴ Likewise it regretted the new fad of the use of the Spenserian stanza for narrative purposes.⁶⁵

Most characteristic of the period is its demand for long poems the while it conditionally accepted the lyric. In a review of Dana in 1830 a *North American Review* critic sighed, "Oh for a poem in ten books or cantos, or even in six,"⁶⁶ and six years later the *American Quarterly Review*⁶⁷ criticized Bryant for not having written an epic, adding that the efforts of American poets are desultory and fugitive. This attitude reflects both neo-classical prejudice, and the earlier American idea that an epic country and an epic national achievement called for epic poems. But the genius of the time was lyrical,

⁶³ 1812. III 8 256

⁶⁴ 1815. IV. 6. 58

⁶⁵ 1817 V. 3. 490; see also McHenry's *American Monthly Magazine*, 1824 1. 231. Allston had written to John Knapp in 1803, "What think you of a poem in the manner of Spenser? It is not a popular mode of versification, and the simplicity of his style . . . is admirably suited to the wildness of Indian story." Jared B Flagg *Life and Letters*, N.Y. 1892, p. 51

⁶⁶ 30. 279

⁶⁷ 1836. 20 505

and Americans were even less successful than the English in the production of long poems. Furthermore, poets were beginning to recognize the truth of the idea which Poe later drove to extremes in his theory of the short poem.

The Scots had offered little guidance for the criticism of the lyric, except as regards formal odes, elegies, and pastorals. True, Blair had made a plea (Lecture 39) for a wider and more modern use of the pastoral, for a reënlivening of the mode, and for less imitation of classical models. The idea had its effect on Wordsworth,⁶⁸ and it is reflected in the *North American Review* article on Hogg's *The Queen's Wake*,⁶⁹ in which the critic praises Hogg for getting away from the traditional artificial and ultra-refined treatment of the pastoral.

But the new lyric had its adherents. The idea was probably German in origin, though no specific influence can be traced to its chief proponent, A. W. Schlegel. Margaret Alterton⁷⁰ has pointed out that Poe very likely acquired it through *Blackwood's Magazine*, which followed Schlegel; that *Blackwood's* had advised poets to limit their poems to one hundred and fifty lines; and that it had accepted the theory that Homer's epics were originally series of short ballads. Whether this was the source of Bryant's similar idea we cannot tell. At any rate, Bryant had it before Poe, for Parke Godwin says⁷¹ that Bryant had expressed the opinion that there is no such thing as a long poem—that it is as impossible as long ecstasy. He records also Bryant's reply in 1833⁷² to Dana's suggestion that he write a long poem: "I will write a poem as long, and, I fear, as tedious, as heart could wish."

During the period, however, the only critique to show even a partial understanding of the philosophy of the lyric appeared in Sidney Willard's *American Monthly Review*⁷³

⁶⁸ E. C. Knowlton, "Wordsworth and Hugh Blair," *Philological Quarterly*, 1927. 6. 277

⁶⁹ 1815. 2. 103

⁷⁰ *Origin of Poe's Critical Theory*, 1925, p. 30

⁷¹ *Life of William Cullen Bryant*, p. 186

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 296

⁷³ 1. 296

in 1832. In a discussion of Bryant, the critic asks whether, like Burns, Collins, and Gray, he is popular because of his short poems. Length, he says, is thought to be essential by those who do not relate length and material. The truth is that it is hard to do a thing well in little space. He feels that a great epic requires higher genius than lyrics, but he likes the short poem because it can be retained by the memory, because it recurs to the mind when the same kind of mood that inspired it appears, and because its brevity leaves room for expansion of the subject in the reader's imagination.

But on the whole a great confusion as to the function of the lyric reigned in American criticism. Prescott, for instance, obviously conceived of the lyric in the more literal sense of the word when he said in a review of Cunningham's *Songs of Scotland*⁷⁴ that "the existence of a national music is essential to the entire success of lyric poetry." In an article on the "Poetry and Romance of the Italians,"⁷⁵ Prescott reflects the neo-classical prejudice against ultra-emotionalism when he says,

Lyrical compositions, the expression of natural sensibility, are generally most abundant in the earlier periods of a nation's literature . . . But Italy is the only country in which lyrical composition . . . has been cultivated by the most polished writers of the age. . . . Lyrical poetry is more immediately the offspring of imagination, or of deep feeling, than any other kind of verse.

These remarks are better understood in the light of his statement in an article on "Italian Narrative Poetry" that up to the eighteenth century there was too much art for art's sake in Italy—too much melody—"too concentrated an attention to beauty."⁷⁶ An *American Quarterly Review* critic said of the lyric, in a review of some Italian lyric poets,⁷⁷ that it was the first expression of society. Its object is to express high and noble thoughts, to awaken recollections which agitate and thrill the soul, and dispose it for the reception of exalted

⁷⁴ *North American Review*, 1826 23, 124

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1831, 33 34

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 1824, 19 337

⁷⁷ 1834 16 42

sentiments. The lyric is *not* what many modern poets would have us think it. It does not embrace "the tender strains of lovers, the cold conceits of sophisticated sentiment, the merry effusions of bacchanalian minstrels"

A similar confusion obtained in the discussion of that particularly romantic form of lyric, the sonnet. Recent research has shown that the sonnet was by no means an unpopular form in early American poetry,⁷⁸ but criticism was slow in appreciating it. In 1811 the *Portfolio*⁷⁹ praised the author of *Sketches in Verse* for satirizing the sonnet. The same magazine gave some hint of the reason for its animosity to the form when it said in a review of an English work,⁸⁰ "We consider the style and manner of Lord Byron to be those of the sonnet, where the clause does not terminate the line; and we also consider that style and manner to lead more to perceptions and sentiment than to illustrations from nature." Even the liberals accepted it reluctantly. Dana, for instance, said in a review of Allston in 1817,⁸¹ "Some of his sonnets almost reconciled us to that kind of writing." But from then on the *North American Review* accepted the form without reservation. The *Southern Review* declared that the sonnet is "essentially barbarous",⁸² and it cannot be said that the mode conquered the citadels of conservatism until, in 1836, the *American Quarterly Review*, in a review of the sonnets of Wordsworth,⁸³ discussed its form and history and defended it. The reviewer defined its various forms, pointed out its history in English literature, proved that although it was foreign in origin it had been naturalized, and attacked Johnson and Byron for opposing it on the ground that Johnson had great limitations as a critic and that Byron lacked discipline. Poetic discipline, said the reviewer, is encouraged by the sonnet, and yet it has great possibilities. The review closed with the suggestion that a collection of sonnets be published.

⁷⁸ H. C. Davidson "The Sonnet in Seven Early American Magazines and Newspapers," *American Lit.* 1932 4 180

⁷⁹ III 5. 269

⁸⁰ 1820 V. 10 163

⁸¹ *North American Review*, 5. 386

⁸² 1832. 8. 460

⁸³ 19 420

On the whole, American criticism contributed little to the development of versification in the early romantic period, and that little was negative. Its chief service was its resistance to the carelessness which characterized the revolt against Popeian metrics, and at its best it could only suggest, as did Willard Phillips⁸⁴ and Dana,⁸⁵ that although adherence to a regular measure is not necessary, the poet must have a "good ear" and a sense of harmony.

⁸⁴ *North American Review*, 1817. 5 98

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1817. 5 365

VI

CRITICISM OF PROSE STYLE AND THE ESSAY

1. PROSE STYLE AND THE ESSAY

IN THE FIRST third of the nineteenth century an evolution in prose style took place which weaned Americans from their admiration of Johnson and of Addison, and culminated, on the one hand, in the clear and simple style of Hawthorne, and on the other, in the colorful and vivid style of Emerson, Melville, and Whitman. The key figures in that evolution were Hugh Blair, Wordsworth, and the English romantic essayists. The ideal was clarity, simplicity, and naturalness, but these terms were subject to successive stages of interpretation. According to Dr. Flewelling, the revolt against Gibbon and Johnson began before 1800.¹ The critics found them too florid and bombastic, and turned for guidance to the more supple style of Addison and Steele. The same preference prevailed in the criticism of the first decade, though the *Literary Miscellany's* attack on the style of Gibbon² may be balanced against the declaration of the *Portfolio*,³ which revered Johnson, that sound effects are more important than brevity.

The main force in the shift from Johnson to Addison was Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*. In the first lecture Blair declared himself as follows:

Indeed when the arts of speech and writing are mentioned, I am sensible that prejudices against them are apt to rise in the minds of many. A sort of art is immediately thought of that is ostentatious and deceitful; the minute and trifling study of words alone; the pomp of expression; the studied fallacies of rhetoric;

¹ H L Flewelling: *Critical Opinion in American Periodicals, 1780-1812*, p. 45.

² 1806. 2. 351

³ 1807. II 3. 177

ornament substituted in the room of use. . . . But sure it is equally possible to apply the principles of reason and good sense to this art. . . . If the following lectures have any merit, it will consist in an endeavor to substitute the application of these principles in the place of artificial and scholastic rhetoric, in an endeavor to explode false ornament, to direct attention more towards substance than show, to recommend good sense as the foundation of all good composition, and simplicity as essential to all true ornament.

These were telling words, and he applied his principle concretely in his discussions of syntax. Many of his principles may be considered a permanent part of English rhetoric, particularly those which deal with the position of adverbs and of parenthetical matter, the proper use of relative pronouns, sentence unity, climax, and parallelism. He illustrated all these points in analyses of prose passages from Addison and Swift.

His principles dominated criticism of style throughout the period, but they were unsatisfactory on three scores: They encouraged that artificial, impersonal, and unidiomatic precision which Holmes called "Blairing-it"; they encouraged Latinity of diction; and they neglected the elements of emotion and sensibility. In the third decade the critics began to take notice of these faults, and, with the then increasing authority of Wordsworth behind them, they began to protest. The first change came about partly through Rousseau, the "sensibility" of whose style was universally praised, and partly through Irving, whose *Sketch Book* in 1819 showed the world that style might be "correct" in the Addisonian sense and yet be a suitable vehicle for sentiment. R. H. Dana praised his ability to mingle wit and sentiment, and thought him superior to Sterne.⁴

The best discussion of the Irvingesque style, which was also the only good discussion, before 1830, of the essay as a form, was written by W. H. Prescott for the *North American Review* in 1822.⁵ It was called "Essay Writing," and the occasion was the publication of *The Club Room* and *The Idle*

⁴*North American Review*, 1819 9. 322

⁵*Ibid.*, 1822. 14 319

Man. It began with a history of the essay, and then proceeded to a discussion of English style. Prescott thought Johnson's principle of sentence-balance one of the great contributions to English style. He then summarized the forces which were undermining the tradition: abstract speculation (i.e., German and Coleridgean philosophy), excessive refinement, affectation, and "conceitedness." Stewart's style was a bad influence because it was too ornamental, Coleridge's because of its mysticism. He traced the American essay through Franklin, Dennie, Ames, and Buckminster, all of them practitioners of classical English.

The Sketch Book certainly forms an epoch in the history of this kind of literature; for, although of the same generic character with the British essayists, it has many important specific peculiarities. The former were written . . . with a direct moral tendency, to expose and to reform the ignorance and the follies of the age. *The Sketch Book*, on the other hand, has no direct moral purpose, but is founded on sentiment and deep feeling. . . . In one word, the principal object of the British essayists was to instruct, so they have for the most part given a picture of common life, in simple language, while the principal object of *The Sketch Book*, being to delight, scenes only of exquisite emotion are selected and painted in the most exquisite, but artificial language.

Aside from being one of those rare criticisms that arrive at a principle, this article reflects the average critic's dislike of the mystical style which Dana and other Coleridge enthusiasts affected. But Prescott expressed himself often and at great length on other aspects of the subject. He had built his own style on a careful study of various models and on a laborious consideration of the problems involved. Ticknor says,

With what self-distrust he went back, when he was already twenty-five years old [1821], and toiled through Murray's *English Grammar* and Blair's *Rhetoric*, as if he were a schoolboy, and how he followed up these humble studies with a regular investigation of what was characteristic in all the great English prose-writers, from Roger Ascham down to our own times. . . .⁶

⁶ *Life of William Hickling Prescott*, Philadelphia, 1875, p. 203

How he proceeded on the basis of Blair's principles and went beyond them is to be seen in his remarks on *Ferdinand and Isabella*:

With regard to the style of this work I will only remark that most of the defects, such as they are, may be comprehended in the words *trop soigné*. At least, they may be traced to this source. The only rule is, to write with freedom and nature, even with homeliness of expression occasionally, and with alternation of long and short sentences, for such variety is essential to harmony. But, after all, it is not the construction of the sentence, but the tone of the coloring, which produces the effect. If the sentiment is warm, lively, forcible, the reader will be carried along without much heed to the arrangement of periods, which differs exceedingly in different standard writers. Put life into the narrative, if you would have it take. Elaborate and artificial fastidiousness in the form of expression is highly detrimental to this. A book may be made up of perfect sentences and yet the general impression may be very imperfect. In fine, be engrossed with the thought, and not with the fashion of expressing it.⁷

Although Prescott disliked the new romantic essayists, it may be seen in this paragraph that he arrived independently at one of their principles: that the style is molded by the thought. Unlike some of them, however, he believed always in keeping control of emotion and in managing carefully its expression.

Another new tendency in American style appears in some remarks which Prescott made on the occasion of the *London Quarterly's* review of his *Ferdinand*. I refer to the growing preference for Anglo-Saxon in place of Latinic diction. Criticizing his own work, he said:

The second volume affords examples of words not so simple as they might be; not objectionable in themselves, but unless something is gained in the way of strength or of coloring it is best to use the most simple *unnoticeable* words to express ordinary things; ex. gr. "to send" is better than "to transmit"; "crown descended" better than "devolved"; "guns fired" than "guns

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

discharged", "to name," or "call," than "to nominate"; "to read" than "peruse." . . .⁸

His general idea, again a new one to a country brought up on "models," was that every man must develop his own style:

It should be the natural expression of his mental character. . . . The best, undoubtedly, for every writer, is the form of expression best suited to his peculiar turn of thinking, even at some hazard of violating the conventional tone of the most chaste and careful writers. It is this alone which can give full force to his thoughts. . . . The best rule is to dispense with all rules of grammar, and to consult the natural bent of one's genius.⁹

These remarks are of more than merely personal interest, even though they did not appear in print. They are the opinions of a conservative, representative writer, a reviewer for the *North American*, who developed out of the accepted tradition. In spite of his insistence on freedom from rules, he never tolerated the sort of freedom which is affectation. Thus, in an article on C. B. Brown, he decried the novelist's "unusual and pedantic epithets, and elliptical forms of expression, in perpetual violation of idiom [which he] resorted to at the expense of simplicity and nature."¹⁰

These ideas were being expressed everywhere in the twenties. Bryant, disciple of Wordsworth, wrote in a letter to a young writer:

I think if you will study the English language that you will find it capable of expressing all the ideas you may have. [This in reference to the use of French phrases.] Be simple and unaffected; be honest in your speaking and writing. Never use a long word where a short one will do as well. Call a spade by its name, not a well-known instrument of manual labor; let a home be a home, not a residence. . . . When a short word will do you, you will always lose by a long one; you lose in clearness, you lose in honest expression of meaning, and, in the estimation of all men who are capable of judging, you lose in reputation for ability.¹¹

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 207

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 208, 209

¹⁰ "Memoir of Charles Brockden Brown," Prescott's *Biographical and Critical Miscellanies*, New York, 1845, p. 50

¹¹ John Bigelow. *William Cullen Bryant*, New York, 1890, p. 73

How much this sort of advice was needed may be judged by Willard Phillips' remark that Cooper's *The Pilot* was

. . . thoroughly American—in one respect too much so; as for instance, where Col. Howard is said to take a little time “to remove the perspiring effects of the unusual toil from his features,” a sort of writing which is too much in use with us, and may be said, perhaps, to constitute a national characteristic of our literature, if there be such a thing.¹²

It should also be noted that Hawthorne, whose *Scarlet Letter* is a model of good style, used in *Fanshawe*, which was published in 1828, such expressions as “piscatorial instrument” when he meant “fishing pole.” But Cooper was rather worse than many of his contemporaries, and it is surprising that only Phillips attacked the most deplorable of his “literary offenses.”

The fight went on in other quarters. As early as 1824 the *United State Literary Gazette* thought Irving's style “passé.” It said that the world is getting to be practical; that it regards the meaning more than the manner of the author; that it demands directness and energy in thought and expression.¹³ That it had the right to make such claims may be seen in a *New York Review* notice of the *Gazette* praising its Anglo-Saxon style and deriding the unwieldy Johnsonianism of fashionable writers.¹⁴ Generally, the magazines of the Sands-Bryant group revered the dictional principles of Wordsworth.

In Boston the *Christian Examiner* helped in the campaign for simpler style, and often attacked writers for heaviness and inflation. In 1833 it praised Dana's language as “remarkably pure Saxon,” compact and simple.¹⁵ One of the best statements of the new attitude toward style was made by an *Examiner* critic—W. E. Channing. In his “Remarks on National Literature” he said:

But in nothing is the creative power of a gifted writer seen more than in his style. True his words may be found in the dictionary.

¹² *North American Review*, 1824. 18. 314

¹³ 1824. 1. 161

¹⁴ 1825. 1. 219

¹⁵ 1834. 15. 397

But there they are disjointed and dead. What a wonderful life does he breathe into them by compacting them into sentences. Perhaps he uses no term which has not been hackneyed by ordinary writers; and yet with these vulgar materials what miracles does he achieve. What a world of thought does he condense into a phrase. By new combinations of common words, what delicate hues or what a blaze of light does he pour over his subject. Power of style depends very little on the structure or copiousness of the language which the writer of genius employs, but chiefly, if not wholly, on his own mind. The words, arranged in his dictionary, are no more fitted to depict his thoughts than the block of marble in the sculptor's shop to show forth the conceptions which are dawning in his mind. Both are inert materials. The power which pervades them comes from the soul . . .¹⁶

In spite of this new spirit, however, American critics did not welcome enthusiastically the individualistic prose of Lamb, Hazlitt, and De Quincey. The first of these was hardly noticed until the end of the period; the second was noticed early and unfavorably; the third was not appreciated. America was not yet ready for styles of distinctive flavor.

De Quincey's reputation in America began in 1823 with a take-off on *The Opium Eater* from *Blackwood's* reprinted in the *Portfolio*.¹⁷ In the following year the *United States Literary Gazette* gave the same volume a favorable but very short notice.¹⁸ The only long review in the period was by Willard Phillips, who disliked the subject matter and seemed to consider it simply a book on opium. But of its style he said,

It abounds in fantastical and splendid images, and is interspersed with descriptions of great beauty and magnificence, and with detached thoughts and expressions of singular force and felicity . . . The writer makes too much display of his superb "intellect," as he seems to consider it; and although occasionally, and indeed in many instances, he reaches a strain of original and philosophical thinking, at other times he sinks into an obscure sort of metaphysical and mystical prosing, and becomes very formally dull and dry, in the detail of trifling circumstance and common

¹⁶ 1830. 7. 269

¹⁷ 1823. V 15. 391

¹⁸ 1824. 1. 38

thoughts. . . . On the other hand, the reader is conciliated by the tone of philanthropy prevailing through the work.¹⁹

Hazlitt received much more, though less respectful, attention. It is true that Dana's famous review was favorable,²⁰ but Dana was more interested in expressing his own opinions than in discussing Hazlitt's Philadelphia critics, however, reviewed him bitterly and at length. Perhaps their judgment of his style was affected by their attitude toward his radicalism, but many of their strictures were sound enough. The *Analectic's* first review merely accused him of imitating Schlegel and of laboring too hard to be natural,²¹ but soon after, it printed an article called "Mr. Hazlitt and His School"²² which was a thoroughgoing attack. In true *Quarterly* style it started off with reflections on his personality and background. It then took up his political radicalism, his regrettable dislike of Johnson, and his worship of the unconventional in Shakespeare's dramatic method. As to style, his school revels in colloquialism; they affect dictional paradoxes, such as "awful beauty," "languid brilliancy," "sullen intricacy"; they use alliteration, and long strings of adjectives and adverbs; they put prepositions at the end of sentences; they pretend general acquaintance with everything and know nothing in detail; they make pedantic references to science and law; they use Bible phrases profanely and impudently; they are all jargon and emotion; they believe that learning may be acquired without study and style without labor. The spread of such doctrines in America must be stopped.

The opposition continued throughout the period. The *Portfolio* said of *Table Talk* in 1822²³ that "Mr. Hazlitt is driven to singularity of manner as a substitute for originality of subjects," and five years later the *Philadelphia Monthly Magazine* said his *Notes of a Journey* was characterized by "a kind of indefinite precision, a love of swinging an antithesis, and losing himself and bewildering the reader in the mists of

¹⁹ *North American Review*, 1824. 18. 92

²⁰ 1819. 8. 276

²¹ 1818. 12. 201

²² 1818. 11. 346

²³ 1822. V. 13. 274

an egotistical philosophy. His feelings are not factitious, and yet they do not seem to be a part of himself."²⁴ Only in 1836 did a Philadelphia magazine—the *American Quarterly Review*—have a good word to say for him, and it granted that only after a long sermon on the necessity for watchfulness on the part of critics against radicalism.²⁵

Such was the reception of one of the greatest of the nineteenth-century prose stylists. Decidedly, Mr Hazlitt's individualism was grating to the sensibilities of critics brought up in the Scottish tradition

Lamb's essays were seldom mentioned. Willis did no more than allude to him in the *American Monthly*.²⁶ William Leggett, in his weekly *Critic*, said in a review of *Elia* that Lamb showed "a peculiar tact in bringing dissimilar objects together in association of the most irresistibly ludicrous character,"²⁷ but his review was too short to be important. Willis G. Clark commemorated the death of Lamb in an essay on him in 1835.²⁸ The only thorough consideration given Lamb was that in the *American Quarterly Review* in 1836,²⁹ in an article which is at once analytical and appreciative. It is the high point in criticism of the essay. Essays, said the critic, may be regarded as "letters addressed to the public." They include satire, criticism, and reverie. It is not a popular form now, though the propagandist novelists would do well to use it. Lamb revived the essay of the *Spectator*, and added variation of mood, blending of anecdote and portraiture, and whimsical discursiveness. He has an attractive "confessional" tone, and pleasing familiarity. He uses detail skilfully. His greatest eminence is in his use of pathos and humor, and in his sentimental feeling for mankind. He makes trifles attractive. He is susceptible to impressions. But there is unity in his essays. "He is to life what Wordsworth is to nature. . . . The latter points out the fields and flowers, the meadow rill, the

²⁴ 1827. 1 37

²⁵ 1836 20 265

²⁶ 1829. 1 700

²⁷ 1828 1 69

²⁸ In *Literary Remains*, ed. by L. G. Clark, N.Y., 1844.

²⁹ 1836. 19 185

soul's most primal and simple movements, the mind's most single and unsophisticated tendencies; the former indicates the lesser and scarcely noticed sources of pleasure and annoyance, mirth and reflection, which occur in the beaten track of ordinary life." It is said that Wordsworth took a personal interest in the universe; Lamb took a personal interest in life. "He delighted in designating its everyday, universal, and for that very reason, disregarded experience. . . . He seems to have broke away from the bondage of custom and to have seen all things anew." Above all he is devoted to the ideal. "Indeed he is one of those beings who make us deeply and newly feel how much there is within a human spirit—how independent it may become of extrinsic aids—how richly it may live to itself."

This, and the articles by Prescott and Channing, are the high lights of criticism of the essay. Actually, however, the review just quoted represents the beginning of a new era rather than the old one, for it appeared in the same year as Emerson's discussion of language in *Nature*. In the new era symbolism and new rhythms were to be recognized as legitimate elements of prose.

2. CRITICISM OF THE DRAMA

By the end of the eighteenth century the drama, like the novel, had so degenerated that British critics had acquired a deep-seated prejudice against the stage and had almost ceased to think of drama as a literary form except when it took the form of unactable poetic drama. As comedy declined into farce and tragedy into melodrama the drama fell steadily below the point where the older Johnsonian and Addisonian criticism was either possible or pertinent, and as the first third of the century passed the situation failed to improve. Disgusted with the dramatic literature of the eighteenth century, Jeffrey and other leading critics turned back to Shakespeare for their criteria and used him as model in season and out, grateful whenever Joanna Baillie, or Maturin, or Milman displayed a little of the master's manner or method. Byron

alone exhibited anything approaching genius, and since his poetic dramas were patently undramatic, the critics had to look to new editions of Elizabethan plays for occasion to write dramatic criticism.

In America conditions were little better. Godfrey and Tyler had produced respectable tragedy and comedy, but their work had resulted in no dramatic criticism of importance. At the beginning of the nineteenth century our dramatists were busy with adaptations of foreign plays, and when occasionally they produced something original they received no critical encouragement. Professor Quinn has said that among the obstacles to the development of our drama in the romantic period were the native indifference to American artistic endeavor and the "critical stupidity which followed foreign standards in expecting [the American playwright] to limit his themes to his own country, a standard never demanded of any other race."³⁰ This indictment of the critics of the period is in large measure justified. Yet the first third of the century offers as memorable dramatists only John Howard Payne, William Dunlap, James Nelson Barker, and Robert Montgomery Bird, and though their work was often far better than that of their British contemporaries, it hardly afforded the critics sufficient material on which to establish a significant dramatic criticism. On the other hand, at no time during the period was there adequate literary criticism of American drama. The newspapers and the weeklies offered only stage criticism. Certain hopeful enthusiasts tried to establish dramatic reviews, but the public was indifferent. Professor Mott lists a dozen or more of these published in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston in the first two decades, but only one of them outlasted a single season.³¹ Literary dramatic criticism appeared principally in the monthlies and quarterlies, which deemed most of the contemporary drama beneath their notice. Joseph T. Buckingham's *Polyanthos* followed the stage

³⁰ *History of the American Drama from the Beginning to the Civil War*, p. 391

³¹ *History of American Magazines*, pp. 165-166

in the years 1806-1807 and 1812-1815, but the drama was hardly a fertile source of literary discussion in that period. The *Portfolio* had a Theatrical Review department in which the criticisms are too brief to be of any worth. Brown's *American Review and Literary Journal* and the *United States Literary Gazette* printed short reviews of native plays. The *North American Review* was interested only in foreign and past drama. Only the *American Quarterly Review* of Philadelphia made a serious attempt to keep up with the contemporary American plays, but even there the reviewers devoted most of their space to demands for native plays rather than to the plays themselves.

Critical demands for "national" drama come later and less frequently in these magazines than they had in the fields of poetry and fiction. Emerson had recorded in his *Journal* in 1820 that "Campbell, the poet, said to Professor Everett that the only chance which America has for a truly national literature is to be found in the Drama," but it was not until the latter part of the same decade that an important periodical spoke vigorously on the subject. In 1827 the *American Quarterly Review*, always a champion of American literary independence, printed an article entitled "American Drama" which, though occasioned by the publication of plays by Barker and Dunlap, was primarily a call for a national drama.³² The critic begins on a note of dissatisfaction with contemporary American drama, blaming the managers, who pander to the lowest public taste, and the star system, which necessitates building a play around one person. He continues with a plea for national plays, (i.e., plays which appeal to national feeling) on the ground that the public is now ready for them and that our land offers plentiful material for native plays. American drama up to now, he says, has not been localized either in subject matter or in diction and style.

Five years earlier, W. H. Gardiner had made a similar plea for nationalism in fiction. In neither field had there been any lack of treatment of American subjects, but the critics were

³² 1827, 1 331

beginning to discern that the treatment was unsatisfactory. German historical criticism was making the critics aware that nationalism in literature was a spirit rather than a preoccupation with an event or a locality. They began to be aware that even in the treatment of our own history our writers had failed to reproduce the spirit of American life and character. It cannot be said, however, that all of the responsible critics demanded that our playwrights restrict themselves to native themes. Even the *American Quarterly* modified its demand in a review entitled "Dramatic Literature"³³ which, after showing why our dramatists should ignore contemporary British plays and criticism, said, "It is not necessary to be always writing on national subjects, or illustrating our history and manners. But we do think that the literature of a new country, new in its existence, its institutions, and situation, ought to have a special reference to these circumstances."

Dramatic "illustrations" of our history were plentiful, but the critics begged in vain for dramatic representations of contemporary manners. When the dramatist dealt with America at all he was too apt to exploit the more spectacular phases of its history, character, and institutions. The Indian, for instance, appealed to those who felt keenly the lack of a romantically barbaric period in our history, and between 1825 and 1860 over forty Indian plays were performed on the American stage.³⁴ Up to 1835 these plays were deprecated by the chief critical organs. The *American Quarterly Review*, commenting on the vogue of Indian tragedies in 1832, said that they ought not be supported even though the subject matter is American.³⁵ But the flood of romantic plays continued throughout the first half of the century, and few dramas appeared in answer to the critics' pleas for classicism. The most remarkable of these pleas appeared in John Neal's *Yankee and Boston Literary Gazette*.³⁶ The critic, who was probably Neal himself, complained of our dependence on England for actors and plays, and of the lack of patronage of

³³ 1830. 8. 134

³⁵ 1832 12. 509

³⁴ Quinn, *op. cit.*, p. 275

³⁶ 1829. N.S. 1. 57

native talent. Now that current English drama is beginning to repel decent people we have a chance to build up our national drama. Why not experiment? "We believe that the day is not far off when we shall see nothing but domestic tragedies—prose tragedies—in possession of the stage; founded altogether upon the incidents and business of republican, everyday life." As it turned out, that day was thirty or forty years distant, but the article is further evidence of the preference for reality which the Scottish philosophy and criticism encouraged in our critical thought.

Generally, the magazines either ignored or condemned the drama which the public was enjoying on the stage. This was particularly true at the beginning of the century, when first German sentimental domestic tragedy and then French melodrama held the stage. The wide popularity of Kotzebue at that time called forth no serious and extended consideration of his work from the literary critics. Schiller attracted general condemnation because of the immorality of his drama *The Robbers*,³⁷ but even the articles in which he was attacked seldom paid any attention to the literary merits of his work. Not until after 1813, when Madame de Staël interpreted German literature for the world at large, did American critics begin to write seriously about German dramatists, but by that time their influence on the contemporary American stage had declined.

The attitude of the *Portfolio* was typical. This periodical had from the beginning taken an active interest in both the acted and the printed drama. In its first volume in 1801³⁸ it commented on a new translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein*, objecting to the tediousness of his long soliloquies and declamations, and favoring more diversity of incident. In 1811 its review of *The Robbers*³⁹ consisted simply of an attack on German morality. In 1817⁴⁰ it called Maturin's *Bertram* a disgusting imitation of the Schiller-Byron school. Thereafter

³⁷ See Goodnight's *German Literature in American Magazines*

³⁸ 1801 I 1 37

³⁹ 1811 III. 6 183

⁴⁰ 1817, V. 3, 323

its reviews of the drama were taken principally from English magazines. One of these reprints is interesting if it may be taken as a reflection of the editor's own opinion. It is a review of A. W. Schlegel's *Lectures* and contains a defense of Kotzebue and of domestic drama.⁴¹ But any sort of defense of popular taste was rare, and John Neal was almost alone in his admiration of Maturin's *Bertram*.⁴²

Up to 1815 the literary criticism of the drama was totally inadequate. Its quality is fairly represented in the pages of Stephen Carpenter's *Mirror of Taste and Dramatic Censor*, published in Philadelphia in 1810-1811, the most successful of the dramatic monthlies. It took its principles from Dr. Johnson, a quotation from whose works headed the "Dramatic Censor" department each month. In its "Introduction to the Dramatic Censor"⁴³ it spoke of the drama as a "powerful moral agent" which may train us in manners and deportment. "The legitimate source of judgment lies with those who have by deep study made themselves masters of the first principles of the science [of dramatic criticism]." This is to be done by mastering the literature and criticism of the Greeks and Romans. The first volume of this periodical contains a series on the history of the stage in which the predominating note is dissatisfaction with the contemporary English stage. Most of the criticisms of contemporary plays were very short, the longer articles dealing with the stage and the dramatic literature of the past.

The work of the *Mirror* was an end and a beginning. It was the end of criticism of the drama on classical and Johnsonian principles. It was the beginning of the critical return to the past which was at once a sign of the current degeneracy of the drama and of the desire to rebuild it on the basis of the old drama. From 1815 on American dramatic criticism was markedly historical in method. Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, the Greek dramatists, Molière and the French writers of tragedy, and Goldoni were reread and analyzed and

⁴¹ 1817. V. 3 477

⁴² *Portico*, 1817. 3. 421

⁴³ 1810. 1 49

praised according to the critics' preference for realism or romanticism. In this new trend the chief influences were the brothers Schlegel, their French disciples, and the English romantic essayists and critics.

The influence of the Schlegel brothers was chiefly in the direction of a reinterpretation of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and of cosmopolitanism in literary taste. Herder, Lessing, and Hurd had laid the foundations for these principles, but it was the Schlegels and Madame de Staël who popularized them and set the American critics to examining their literary prejudices. The influence of the German historical critics was both direct and, through Jeffrey and the *Edinburgh Quarterly Review*, indirect. The Schlegels were well known to American critics (see Chapter IV) and their methods became common, between 1820 and 1835, in our critical articles.⁴⁴ A great deal of space in the quarterlies was given to reviews predominantly factual on the history of foreign literatures, and much of this criticism was historical, national, and geographic in method. Moreover, it was perhaps partly due to A. W. Schlegel's great translation of Shakespeare, begun in 1798, that so many editions of Shakespeare appeared in our period in America. Miss Sherzer records twenty-six printings of various editions of Shakespeare's complete works between 1795 and 1836,⁴⁵ though the first one which made any attempt to get away from the eighteenth-century editions and back to the original text came in 1836.⁴⁶ The old prejudice, which persisted to some extent throughout the period, against the "barbarian" literatures of the Middle and Elizabethan ages, abated somewhat. Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists were still considered "incorrect" and sometimes immoral, but they were more thoroughly appreciated, and the reading of their works increased.

⁴⁴ See, for instance, the review of Shiel's *Damon and Pythias* in the *New York Literary and Scientific Repository*, 1821 3 332.

⁴⁵ Jane Sherzer "American Editions of Shakespeare's Works between 1795 and 1836," *PMLA*, 1907 22. 633.

⁴⁶ This was edited by O. W. B. Peabody, *North American Review* critic, and published in Boston in seven volumes. Miss Sherzer calls him the father of textual criticism of Shakespeare in America.

There had been, of course, from the very beginning, Shakespeare devotees among our critics. In 1801 Dennie had run a series of articles on Shakespeare in the *Portfolio*, and it was probably Dennie who edited the Philadelphia edition of Shakespeare in 1805-1809. But after 1810 the tide rose. In that year the *Mirror of Taste* discussed more old plays than new ones. Throughout the period the magazines printed appreciative essays on Shakespeare's characters, and an increasing amount of space was devoted to Elizabethans other than Shakespeare. In 1821 the *Literary and Scientific Repository* of New York reviewed several Elizabethan and pre-Elizabethan plays in an article which was not, apparently, occasioned by the recent republication of any of them.⁴⁷

In the many discussions of the language of the stage Shakespeare was frequently referred to as a master of natural, passionate, dramatic idiom. But there was some hesitation in accepting him as a master of form. The *Analectic* in 1818⁴⁸ rebuked Hazlitt for his uncritical worship of Shakespeare and for seeming to think that Shakespeare's violation of classical rules was a virtue. The *Analectic*, however, was classical in its sympathies and would have nothing to do with the romantic enthusiasm of the English and the Germans. The *North American Review*, on the other hand, gave the new critics a hearing and was generally in favor of their methods. A. H. Everett, in his "Geoffroy on Dramatic Literature,"⁴⁹ recognized Geoffroy as a coldly classical antagonist of romanticism and an outmoded reactionary. But it was Prescott, the unwilling disciple of A. W. Schlegel, who spoke at greatest length on the comparative merits of the English and the French traditions in drama. In his "French and English Tragedy"⁵⁰ (a review of Jouy's *Sylla* and Croly's *Catiline*) he found that the supremacy of Elizabethan drama was due to its intense nationalism. The principle of the old English plays, he says, was veracity to both beauty and ugliness, and when the dramatists broke rules they did it deliberately and not out of ignorance. The whole article is an almost Schlegelian defense

⁴⁷ 1821 3 42⁴⁹ 1820 10. 291⁴⁸ 1818 12 201⁵⁰ 1823. 16 124

of the natural, primitive realism of the old romantic drama, a plea for the indigenous in national drama, and a denial of the validity of Gallic dramatic theory.

More and more, as the period advanced, the conservative critics gave evidence of their preference for humanistic romance as opposed to the egotistic romanticism of Rousseau and Byron. In the review just quoted Prescott observed that although there was no lack of good poetry the drama was lamentably weak because "in modern poets the pervading and animating principle is egotism." The muse, he complained, is no longer social; and though the principle of egocentricity may produce good descriptive poetry, it is fundamentally antipathetic to the dramatic spirit. A second reason for the decline of the drama, he said, is the frequent indulgence of dramatic poets in abstract speculation, metaphysics, and moral subtleties. A third is the habit of reading rather than seeing plays.

The first of these arguments is characteristic of the period. The American critic missed, above all, the objectivity and the social spirit of the older literatures, and in his reaction to the cloying introversion of contemporary poetry he found refuge in the literature of the Renaissance. There he discovered not only the romantic escape which he enjoyed in common with the general public, but a romanticism grounded in real life, objectively seen by spiritually healthy writers. It offered an escape from the commonplace, and yet it showed respect for discipline and restraint. It offered the basis for a humanistic idealism in an age of shattered standards in which popular taste cheapened everything that it touched.

In 1827 much the same attitude prevailed in one of the literary societies of New York City. On the untimely death of Jonathan Lawrence, Jr. in 1833 the association to which he belonged published some of his essays,⁵¹ one of which, "On English Comedy" (1827), expressed disgust with contemporary English comedy. "We want delights of the mind, and they give us fooleries of sense; we ask for improvement of heart and

⁵¹ *A Selection from the Writings of Jonathan Lawrence, Jr.*, N.Y., 1833

mind, and they give us idiot wonder." For that reason he advised a return to the study of old English comedy, particularly that of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

By the end of our period there had appeared the first of our memorable Shakespearean critics—R. H. Dana, the elder, whose unpublished Lectures on Shakespeare were first delivered in 1834. Dana had been an admirer of Hazlitt's essays on Shakespeare, and his lectures are one of the earliest examples in America of the new Shakespeare criticism. They escape, however, the charges levelled at Hazlitt, for Dana lays heavy emphasis on the social nature of Shakespeare's plays, as may be judged by the title of the second lecture, "The Influence of Society on the Poet." Other lectures were devoted to the female characters, the supernatural, violence on the Elizabethan stage, and to individual plays. All of them show an insight and an appreciative sense which were rare in that day.⁵²

A similar humanistic trend was displayed in the rising enthusiasm for the works of Molière and Goldoni. The latter's works were reviewed at length by Madame de la Barca in the *North American Review*,⁵³ and Prescott, in the same publication, called Goldoni the "Molière of Italy."⁵⁴ Three decades later another champion of the humanistic and social point of view, William Dean Howells, studied and was influenced by the same dramatist. The greatest admirer of Molière was Prescott, though all our reviewers of French literature preferred him to the classicists. The *North American Review* in 1828⁵⁵ published a long review by Prescott of Taschereau's life of Molière in which the critic attacked Schlegel for his depreciation of Molière and defended the latter for his preoccupation with manners rather than with passions. The follies of men, he said, are permanent and universal; love has its comic side; and vanity and affectation are best ridiculed in the

⁵² These lectures are summarized in Weimar's *Richard Henry Dana, the Elder, Critic*

⁵³ 1834 39 329

⁵⁴ 1831. 33 29

⁵⁵ 1828 27. 372

drama. He thought Molière's wit superior to Congreve's because the former had a more noble moral aim, and defended his emphasis upon argument rather than action.

Meanwhile, the development of German drama was being contemplated with mixed feelings. At the beginning of the century Gessner alone had been considered "safe," and Schiller had brought about a general distrust of German morality. But in the second decade, with increased knowledge of German literature through the Harvard group and through translations, critics began to pay more serious attention to the Germans. The *North American Review*, particularly, showed a more favorable attitude in its articles on Grillparzer,⁵⁶ Goethe,⁵⁷ and Schiller.⁵⁸ The *American Quarterly Review* was less sympathetic, but the *Christian Examiner*, although it deprecated some aspects of the German mind, assigned a high place to Goethe in fiction, criticism, and the drama.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, none of these articles offers much specific criticism of the drama as such; they are concerned almost entirely with the spirit of the new German literature and with estimating its relationship to the moral and social ideals of America. Generally, though they admired its poetic quality and its intensity, they deplored its tendency toward excessive individualism in moral standards.

None of the dramatic critics paid much attention to form and technique. The rules by which the eighteenth-century critics were dominated were sometimes discussed, but the general tendency was to question their validity. Our critics seemed to be in general agreement with the point of view of Blair and Kames, which was an Aristotelianism modified by rationalism and sentimentalism. Kames devoted two chapters to the drama in his *Elements*. In the first, Chapter XXII, on Tragedy, after giving Aristotle's definition he sets forth three rules: (1) that an innocent person should never be the subject of a tragedy; (2) that a sinner must not be allowed to achieve happiness; (3) that the misfortunes of the wicked are

⁵⁶ 1823, 16, 283.

⁵⁸ 1834, 39, 1.

⁵⁷ 1824, 19, 303.

⁵⁹ 1830, 8, 187.

not a suitable subject for the drama. These rules apply to moral tragedy; the scope of pathetic tragedy is wider. Neither type, however, admits of mere chance as the occasion of tragedy, and neither must give the "impression of anarchy or misrule." The antipathy between Kames's point of view and that of the German dramatists of the "Storm and Stress" school is apparent, and whether or not our critics were influenced by Kames in their opposition to the Schiller group, their sympathy with the Scot cannot be doubted.

As to form generally, Kames ruled that the tragedy must be unified in plot; that it must contain no violent action; that its dialogue must be logically continuous; and that blank verse should be used for "high" material and prose for "low" material. Chapter XXIII is devoted to a discussion of the three unities, the conclusion being that of the most liberal eighteenth-century critics, who denied the applicability of the unities of time and place to modern drama, and insisted only on unity of action. Kames did not discuss comedy.

Blair's three chapters on drama in his *Lectures* reflect more definitely the spirit of the late eighteenth century. In Chapter XLV, on Tragedy, he emphasizes moral and sentimental values, saying that tragedy is favorable to virtue and that its end is not so much the elevation of the imagination as the affection of the heart; still more important, that tragedy need not end unhappily and that its hero need not be illustrious. Blair also decreed that songs should not be inserted in plays because they are undramatic; that there must be an apparent reason for exits and entrances; that probability must be observed, and that there must be no "machinery" or fabulous supernatural intervention. Finally, the language of the drama must be appropriate: impassioned characters must not indulge in description, and all emotional passages must be simple.

Chapter XLVI deals historically with Greek, French, and English tragedy. Chapter XLVII, on Comedy, divides the type into two kinds, comedy of character and comedy of intrigue. The former is more important because of its moral

value. Satirical exhibitions of the improprieties (i.e., the slighter vices) and of the follies of men are a social tonic. But comedy should avoid extravagance and the artificial contrasting of characters. Prose is the proper medium.

There was too little dramatic criticism in our period to trace specific indebtedness to the Scots, but it is apparent that their point of view was agreeable to the American critic. He insisted on probability and decorum, and on unity of plot. He favored blank verse over rhyme, and the use of prose for low materials. Above all he insisted on a greater naturalness and propriety in dramatic diction than had prevailed formerly. On this subject the development of a point of view is fairly clear. At the beginning of the period the *Mirror of Taste*⁶⁰ had expressed the ancient preference for a literary and artificial diction when it said that the dramatic critic must be able "to distinguish the language of the schools from that of the multitude—the polished diction of refinement from the coarse style of household colloquy—the splendid, figurative, and impressive combination of terms adapted to poetry, from those plain and familiar expressions suited to the sobriety of prose" This utterance came at the beginning of the transitional period when artificial diction in literature gave way to the "language of men" and literary style became modern. By 1817 so conservative a review as the *Portico*⁶¹ could object to the florid descriptions in Maturin's *Bertram* as undramatic. Bryant, disciple of Wordsworth, usually commented upon the quality of diction when he reviewed drama, and Neal, in his general articles on drama in the *Yankee*, discoursed on the unsuitability of the poetic style for dramatic purposes. His second article in the series⁶² was devoted principally to the nature of the language of passion and to Shakespeare's mastery of it. The *American Quarterly Review*, in a long article on American drama in 1827⁶³ protested against the unnaturalness of our dramatic diction, its "glittering incongruities and con-

⁶⁰ 1810. 1. 57

⁶² 1829. 1. 134

⁶¹ 1817. 3. 426

⁶³ 1827. 1. 341

fused metaphors," which are "destructive to the clearness and simplicity of true poetry." Three years later it said that the chief fault of our playwrights was their addiction to cold, high-sounding declamataion which makes the communication of strong feeling impossible.

This criticism of diction, and the development of the humanistic point of view, were the chief contributions of the period to dramatic criticism. In addition the general tendency to think of dramatic form as organic helped to prepare the way for the freer and fuller criticism of Henry Norman Hudson (whose *Lectures on Shakespeare*, 1848, were dedicated to Dana), E. P. Whipple, Lowell, and Richard Grant White

VII

CRITICISM OF FICTION

WHEN Henry James, in *The Art of Fiction* (1884), complained that novelists did not take their art seriously, he was combating a situation which was rather more complicated than he seemed to think. It is quite true that the old Puritanical prejudice against fiction long survived, but, as was true of the Puritan revolt against the drama in the seventeenth century, that prejudice had a broader foundation than the merely moral one. It was really an antipathy to a type of literature which, up to about 1820, so prettified and melodramatized life that it tended to distort and obscure, in the minds of its predominantly juvenile and female audience, the realities and the necessities of living. American criticism early realized that fact, and it was at one with James in thinking that living is a serious business and must be treated as such in fiction. It is also true that American novelists have often taken their "art" lightly, but that attitude cannot be shown to have any moral basis. If it be pointed out that Eggleston apologized for writing *The Hoosier School Master* by saying that it was a picture of real life, one can also show that Mark Twain, F. Marion Crawford, and Ring Lardner made light of the "problems" of fiction in spite of their own successes in that field. Almost always the scoffers have been satirists who were capable of making fun of themselves the while they laughed at the human race. At any rate, they had ample precedent in the playfulness of Fielding, whose serio-comic interchapters have probably influenced American novelists other than Paulding and Kennedy.

But James's principles of artistic seriousness and truth to life were not as original as some historians think. The devel-

opment of the novel as a form was perhaps impeded by the lack of a critical tradition, and the growth of realism came rather late, but both of them had their inception in the quarter century preceding Poe. The critics of that period had almost no guidance in the field of fiction. Moreover, the fictional product of the time gave them little great material to work with. They could only feel their way, analyzing their antipathies, asking for what they wanted, but getting nothing from which shaping critical principles might be derived. One is given the impression that the novelists did not produce what the times demanded: classical materials pervaded by a vital morality and handled with a sense of form and wholeness. Perhaps the most striking fact about criticism of the novel in the period was its demand for classicism at a time when literature was predominantly romantic. It was the beginning of the classical tradition which reached its full fruition in the work of Howells, James, and Edith Wharton.

It is necessary at this point to define our terms, for critical tradition has produced no universally accepted terminology. Moreover, the dramatic forms of literature are so much more objective than poetry that the terms which are applied to both are usually interpreted differently in the two fields. The two fundamental words are "romanticism" and "realism." Confusion results when no distinction is drawn between materials and method. Thus, "romanticism" is commonly used to denote both unfamiliar materials, and that subjective state of mind which transforms materials, either familiar or unfamiliar, into appearances whose qualities are more interesting than the materials themselves. But subjectivity is not absolute, and its manifestations are so various that the term loses meaning. In the discussions of poetry I have used the word "romanticism" to indicate egotism in its philosophical sense. Its opposite is classicism, meaning that attitude of mind by which life is observed and judged objectively. One might say that romantic literature sees and judges life through the eyes of the isolated, egotistic individ-

ual, and that classical literature sees and judges life through the eyes of society. In any discussion of the culture of a period these terms are useful because they take cognizance of the perennial struggle between the individual and society.

But in fiction they are inadequate, for unlike poetry, philosophy, and the personal essay, the materials of fiction usually have an interest separable from the author's interpretation of life. In the criticism of fiction, then, I shall use a terminology for which I am indebted to Professor Arthur Hobson Quinn. According to him, romanticism refers to materials, and is opposed to classicism; realism refers to treatment, and is opposed to idealism. By this method, one can avoid the confusion which ordinarily results in discussions of novels which are romantic in material but realistic in treatment, or classical in material and idealistic in treatment. Romantic material is strange, unusual, or distant material; classical material is familiar, ordinary material. Realism is an attempt to describe life as it is or was; idealism is a deliberate coloring and shaping of the real thing to make it seem better than it is. Also, there is a kind of inverse idealism which makes the real thing worse than it is. Thus, the goodness of the heroine in the melodrama is no more real than the badness of the villain.

American criticism of fiction began after 1815, the date of Scott's *Waverly*. Before then the reputable critical journals either did not notice fiction or noticed it only to attack it on moral grounds. Before 1822 the *North American Review* did not even list novels among the new books. There was no respect for the novel as a literary form, and there was no critical tradition or body of rules to give it literary standing. England, to which American critics looked for guidance, had developed no theories of fiction. A student of English criticism of the novel during the eighteenth century¹ has concluded that that era contributed nothing to the de-

¹ J. B. Heidler. *A History, from 1700 to 1800, of English Criticism of Prose Fiction*, Univ. of Illinois, *Studies in Language and Literature*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, May, 1928

velopment of the novel. Richardson and Sterne were admired for their sensibility; Fielding was not considered respectable. When romance came in, Clara Reeve defined it as a relation of events, in lofty and elevated language, of what never happened. Between 1789 and 1800 the reviews gave way slowly to Gothic romance, admitting the skilful handling of the type by some writers, but never wholly convinced that merely diverting fiction deserved recognition. A few came to the conclusion that it was a fad doomed to a short life because "terror" devices must degenerate from repetition. The general tendency of criticism was to demand truthful characterization and careful plot development.

After 1800 a reaction against Richardsonian sentiment and Gothic terror set in, and the critics asked for moral and realistic portrayals of people and events within human experience.² The world wanted romance, but it also wanted probability, which meant a fictional technique capable of effecting suspension of disbelief. In 1814 Dunlop's *History of Prose Fiction* demonstrated the venerableness and dignity of the romantic genre, and in the following year *Waverly* opened up a new era in English fiction.

Meanwhile in America the course of criticism had been somewhat different. The Gothic fad attracted scarcely any notice before 1800,³ and in spite of the tremendous popularity of sentimental fiction it was not dignified by critical recognition. The magazines were full of anti-novel articles, and criticism took the form of general essays commonly called "Observations on Novel-Reading"

Looking back on the past century in 1803 Dr. Samuel Miller⁴ condemned half of the novels it produced as lewd and bad, saying that they described all kinds of crime and immorality with the apology that these were characteristics of modern society. But Dr. Miller was not to be beguiled by this sort of "classicism." These novels idealized immorality.

² B. H. Gibson. *A History, from 1800 to 1832, of English Criticism of Prose Fiction*, Univ of Illinois thesis, 1931

³ Flewelling *Critical Opinion in American Periodicals, 1780-1812*

⁴ *Brief Retrospect of the 18th Century*, N. Y., 1803, I, 176

"To fill the mind with unreal and delusive pictures of life, is, in the end, to beguile it from sober duty, and to cheat it of substantial enjoyment." The writer was a Common Sense realist of the Scotch school, and his observations suggest, what is generally true, that the Scottish philosophy had its effect on criticism of fiction. As one would expect, that influence was in the direction of classicism and idealism. Fiction, like philosophy, must take cognizance of the daily realities of the life of the general run of mankind; yet it must avoid skepticism, pessimism, and immorality—that is, it must idealize the institutions and the virtues which hold society together. Seen from this point of view, the early attacks on the novel take on a significance which the Puritan-baiter is likely to overlook in his eagerness to expose self-righteous cant. One must realize that the novels against which these attacks were directed contained in magnified form all the defects and untruths which Howells and James were later to assail in a more dignified and reasoned manner.

Typical of these diatribes is an essay "On Novels and Novel Reading" which appeared in the *Mirror of Taste and Dramatic Censor* (Philadelphia) in 1811:⁵

Nineteen in twenty of these books so called are positively mischievous. . . . If a novel be so perfectly natural as to give a true picture of life, it does no more for us than is already done to our hands in the ordinary incidents of the day. . . . If, on the other hand, it present an untrue picture of life, it imparts false and exaggerated notions which are sure to corrupt the heart. . . . It tends to fill young minds with fancies and expectations which can never, in the natural course of things, be gratified or accomplished. It presents a double picture of human condition; one a paradise, the other a hell. . . . In life one cannot find among the worst such fiends, or among the best, such angels, as those of whom he has been reading. . . . and to the deep novel reader, this world and its uses seem flat, stale, and unprofitable. . . . Divine religion teaches us that when we come into life we enter upon a state of trial and labour, which is only to end in the grave, and that trial is the basis of a final sentence. . . . Our education

⁵ 1811. 3. 86

is a part of this trial. . . . It is therefore of the highest importance not only to waste no time upon, but to form no taste for, any acquisitions which may not be converted to higher purposes than those of mere amusement. To make our trial more difficult, nature has given us a reluctance to great exertion of mind, and a dislike for dry, uninteresting instruction. Hence arises a fondness for works of fiction, which delight the fancy, while they hold out treacherous, delusive hopes, and presume to be vehicles of instruction, without, in the smallest degree, taxing the mind. . . .

Some who now live, and are not old, must remember the time when the number of novels being so few that they were quickly exhausted, history, excellent poetry, and the lighter ethics afforded the customary relaxation to our females in their leisure hours, and the window seat, where now the worthless novel holds an undisputed throne, was covered with those admirable works, the *Spectator*, the *Tatler*, the *Guardian*, and others not less laudable. The attractions of young ladies then were not confined to their personal charms, heightened by frivolous external accomplishments, and by those artful embellishments which dress, or want of dress, is supposed to bestow; nor to the recital of some incident, piteous and unnatural as weakness and sensibility, degenerated into distraction, can make it, taken from some fulsome novel; nor to the miserable imitation of some flippancy or folly—the leer, the affected anguish, the yawn of feigned ennui, the soft and tender sigh, the pretty pet or pout, the pert titter, adopted from some imaginary countess, or other favorite character; the knowledge of young ladies then was considerable, in some cases extensive, untainted with pedantry or conceit, and, in general abundantly adequate to all laudable and useful purposes; without being aware of it, a thousand loves lay in ambush behind their lips, wise and good men became at once their slaves and their protectors, the soul and the intellectual sense took the lead of the animal; and the idea of a sacred, indissoluble union preceded personal wish. Even those whom age, infirmity, or prior union forbade to hope, could not help combining with such subjects the highest idea of matrimonial bliss, and exclaiming, “Heavens, what a wife will she make! how blest will be the man who obtains her hand!”

There is another, but it must be confessed, when compared with those, rather an inferior consideration. . . . It is this Of

those novels, 99 in 100 tend to deprave the style of those who study them as models, which very many do. In fact, what can be conceived more mischievous in literature, than false notions conveyed in vitious language; than things which have no existence, described in inflated bombast . . . destitute of grammatical correctness, destitute of syntactical connexion.

This essay tells us as much about the fiction of the period as it does about the state of criticism. It was yet to be discovered that a true picture of life might offer something more than life itself, and that the novel might be a force for good without being a tract. But in 1811 the moral point of view was still restrictive rather than dynamic, and another ten years were to pass before Wordsworth and unitarianism took effect on fictional criticism.

As time went on the moral prejudice abated, though it is a question whether it disappeared entirely within the century. As late as 1834 the *North American Magazine*^o complained that although novels are no longer openly immoral, "the nudity is thinly veiled. The unspoken thought, the indefinite suggestions of Sterne, have tempted to more irretrievable sin than ever did the audacious panders of Fielding and Smollett." But such sweeping condemnations were by that time no longer representative. The insistence on social soundness, however, not only persisted but developed into a principle which became the basis of American classicism.

Meanwhile, a concatenation of circumstances drew the attention of the critical and creative world from these questions and centered it on a new romanticism. First, the War of 1812 aroused the critics to demand a native literature. Second, Walter Scott showed America not only that romance could be both probable and respectable, but that it could be a vehicle of nationalism. Third, James Fenimore Cooper made it a vehicle of Americanism. From 1815 to 1828 the chief point of critical discussion was the suitability of American life and history as material for romantic and classical fiction.

^o 1834. 4. 358

The subject had come up somewhat earlier, but to little effect. In the preface to *Edgar Huntly* (1801) C. B. Brown had made some vague references to

... the field of investigation opened up to us by our own country. The sources of amusement to the fancy and instruction to the heart that are peculiar to ourselves, are equally numerous and inexhaustible. It is the purpose of this work to profit by some of these sources; to exhibit a series of adventures growing out of the condition of our country. . . .

But Brown was not very successful in creating a sense of locality, even though he mentioned places and made use of Indians. On the score of classicism, Royall Tyler, in the preface to his *Algerine Captive* (1797), had remarked that "There are two things wanted: that we write our own books of amusement and that they exhibit our own manners," But his plan to "display a portrait of New England manners hitherto unattempted" did not get very far, for the scene of his book shifted from New England to a slave ship and thence to Algiers

To some of the later critics the difficulty of using American materials was obviously due to the fact that America was not exactly like England and that therefore our novelists could not imitate English novelists closely enough. Two years before Cooper's *The Spy* appeared, E. T. Channing said in a review of Dunlap's life of C. B. Brown⁷ that romantic novels are hard to do in America because of the lack of romantic associations, and novels of real life equally difficult because we have no "well-defined classes" and because those that we have are not like English social classes. Brown's scenes, he said, are American without being "distastefully familiar."

These remarks are significant. They reveal, for one thing, the fact that the idea of association which we borrowed from the Scots was being applied to fiction as well as to poetry, and in this field as in the other, the idea was inimical to progress and to the development of fresh fields of inspiration. Critics

⁷ *North American Review*, 1819. 9. 58

and writers alike seemed to think that no new associations could be established. Cooper, for instance, said in his preface to *The Prairie* (1827) that the prairie has no historical recollections, no "poetical associations." And even Hawthorne, who made such excellent use of the "associations" of early Puritan life, was guilty of the queer notion that the writer of romance must escape to a land of established and conventional associations in order to make a complete break with reality. In the preface to the *Marble Faun* he said:

Italy, as the site of his Romance, was chiefly valuable as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon as they are, and must needs be, in America. No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land. . . . Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers need ruin to make them grow

In the second place, Channing's dislike of "disgusting familiarity" reveals a tendency, again traceable to the Scots, which resulted, in later American fiction, in a modified and selective classicism. It was typical of the Scots that they demanded a recognizable reality pruned of all its grossness and raised far enough above the actual to provide escape of a sort.

In the third place, Channing's conception of society as a relationship between social classes reveals the patrician viewpoint of the critic, and, again, throws light on the theory and practice of the later classicists. Howells held that point of view until 1888 when he decided that manners were not as important as the economic factors which were the ultimate cause of differences in manners. James early decided that the novel could be written only in a society where class traditions were firmly established.

But before 1819, there had been little use of romantic American materials. With the arrival of *The Spy* in 1821

the problem of their use began to be explored, and the first article of importance on the subject was W. H. Gardiner's review of *The Spy* in the *North American Review*.⁸ This was in part an answer to Channing's article, Gardiner vigorously denying that we lacked romantic materials and that sharply defined classes were necessary to the production of fiction. The materials for a native romance, he said, are abundant. "In no one country on the face of the globe can there be found a greater variety of specific character than is at this moment developed in this United States of America." To show writers what could be done he catalogued the various American types and scenes—the Yankee peddler, the Ohio boatman, the southern planter, the New York merchant. Moreover, he observed that the humors of "low life" were a legitimate subject for the novelist, a point which caused much controversy.

Various other periodicals took up the cry for American romanticism. The clamorously patriotic *American Quarterly Review*,⁹ for instance, told writers to look for their materials to our own past, and listed subjects for "affecting and beautiful fictions, resting upon actual events." It was particularly interested in the Indian.

If a writer in this country wishes to make its history or its traditions the subject of romantic fiction, high-wrought, obscure, and somewhat extravagant, agreeably to the taste of the times, he must go back to the aborigines. It is there that the materials of character, situations, and superstitions are to be found in abundant profusion, it is among them that life is full of romance and adventure.

But the *Quarterly's* (and Cooper's) enthusiasm about the Indian did not go unchallenged. Indeed, the use of American materials had hardly begun before it met with objections. In part this was due to the weakness of the fictional technique of our romancers, who were constantly compared to Scott; in part to the antagonism which Cooper inevitably aroused in his critics; and in part to the circumstance that

⁸ 1822 15 250

⁹ 1827 2 45

classicism was in the blood of our criticism, for romantic fiction was never greeted with whole-souled and universal enthusiasm, except perhaps when Longfellow put it into poetic form. The general tone of criticism suggests that the critics longed for classicism the while they tried to do reluctant justice to a romance which was seldom handled realistically. American critics were too deeply rooted in cultivated traditions to relish Indians, polished though Cooper's editions of those primitives were, and they felt that historical facts in fiction should be so handled as to be attractive as well as believable.

In the criticism of romance the greatest contribution of the magazines was their demand for realism in the treatment of plot, character, and historical incident. The critics all seemed to be aware of the Aristotelian distinction between possibility and probability, a fact which makes it the more surprising that C. B. Brown should have made the mistake of thinking that "If history furnishes one parallel fact, it is a sufficient vindication of the writer."¹⁰ Even Cooper, who sinned incessantly against probability, drew the distinction in the preface to his *Pilot* (1823):

The privileges of the Historian and of the writer of Romances are very different, and it behooves them equally to respect each other's rights. The latter is permitted to garnish a probable fiction, while he is sternly prohibited from dwelling on improbable truths; but it is the duty of the former to record facts as they have occurred, without a reference to consequences, resting his reputation on a firm foundation of realities and vindicating his integrity by his authorities.

The insistence on probability was due largely to the earlier vogue of the Gothic novel, which, strangely enough, was not severely attacked until Scott showed the world how to write realistic romance. Brown had led the way by his effort to offer natural explanations for the marvels in his stories, and by his remarks in the preface to *Wieland*:

The incidents related are extraordinary and rare. Some of them, perhaps, approach as nearly to the nature of miracles as can be

¹⁰ Preface to *Wieland*, 1798

done by that which is not truly miraculous. It is hoped that intelligent readers will not disapprove of the manner in which appearances are solved, but that the solution will be found to correspond with the known principles of human nature.

Brown's work was treated very kindly by the reviewers, but it is apparent that he was not realistic enough to suit the tastes of the period. Even his "explanations" did not make his plots seem probable.

Cooper was generally attacked for the coincidences in his plots. Mark Twain did nothing new when he bludgeoned Cooper for his sins against good plotting. In 1824 Willard Phillips said of the *Pilot*:¹¹

[He] resembles the old epic heroes in that he is infallible. Our feelings are disturbed by hairbreadth escapes, but it is rude and artificial in an author to resort to good fortune in these emergencies. . . . It shows poverty of invention to bring affairs into such a conjuncture in the midst of the action, that unless the wind changes, or some of the personages are killed off, the story must end.

W. H. Gardiner, in reviewing the *Pioneers*,¹² was somewhat kinder in evaluating Cooper's handling of action: If a reader reads Cooper for the sake of action rather than argument or style, or if he watches the thread of narrative and the fortunes of the characters, he will have a good time. But Cooper is not bothered by the realities of the scenes he describes. His excellence lies in rapidity of incident, vividness of action, and

. . . the invention of the machinery of the piece, by which we mean all that answers in the modern novel as a substitute for the mythological divinities of ancient romance; those subtle agents, bordering on the preternatural who weave and unravel the mysteries of the plot, and effect such surprises of the imagination as are essential to its dramatic effect. It is the creation and adaptation of a kind of machinery, which may be adequate to its objects, original in its character, and yet within the narrowed

¹¹ *North American Review*, 1824. 18 314

¹² *Ibid.*, 1826 23 150

limits of modern probability, that stretch to the utmost the inventive faculties of our novelist.

The comparison with the "mythological divinities" is a clever one, for certainly it would appear that some occult agency is at work in the behalf of Cooper's characters. Gardiner also observed that Cooper's scenery was good if he kept it on a large scale, and that his characters were credible if he kept them out of the drawing room. Bryant made like objections to Sedgwick's *Redwood*,¹³ in which, he said, there was too much romantic machinery and coincidence, and G. S. Hillard said the same thing of her *Clarence*.¹⁴ The *United States Literary Gazette*, which paid careful attention to novels, found *The Last of the Mohicans* full of improbabilities, and remarked that the catastrophe of a novel should be a natural result of preceding events.¹⁵ As far back as 1811 the *Portfolio* had been registering objections to improbabilities in the novel, and the *American Quarterly Review* was similarly watchful of incredibilities in plot.

But the critics also demanded realism of background and character. Gardiner, who had so eloquently demanded Americanism in 1822, protested, in a review of McHenry's *The Wilderness* and *The Spectre of the Forest* in 1824, that our novelists were not sufficiently realistic in their use of the new materials:¹⁶

One would imagine that such works might mirror the physical character and beauty of our country, and the habits, manners, and dialects of our own people. It is with the honest view of correcting such erroneous impressions that we have taken leave to refer to the works named at the head of our article, as containing all the elements of an American novel so far as we have been able to digest them from the mass of writings which have appeared under that lofty appellation. By casting an eye over these pages it will be seen at a glance that the art of writing an American novel is neither more nor less than the act of describing

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1825. 20. 245

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1831. 32. 73

¹⁵ 1826. 4. 87

¹⁶ *North American Review*, 1824. 19. 209

such scenes as are in no respect American, peopling them with adventurers from all quarters of the globe except America, with a native or two here and there, acting as no American ever acts, and talking a language which, on the other side of the water, may pass for American simply because it is not English.

Jared Sparks, reviewing ten American novels in 1825,¹⁷ said that Scott's American imitators had not succeeded in capturing their model's best qualities, for Scott made his scenery seem real, his characters human as well as genuinely provincial, and his dialogue natural. Indeed, American critics seemed to admire Scott's realism of character more than his nationalism, and he was generally called the "modern Shakespeare." The *United States Literary Gazette*¹⁸ said of *The Witch of New England* that the characters are not introduced "so strikingly as to fix the attention upon their conduct of their adventures."

The same magazine had some forceful things to say about realism of character and background, in its review of Cooper's *Lionel Lincoln*.¹⁹

The character of the novels of the present day is more closely allied to the drama, in the course of which characters, imaginary indeed in that situation, make their entrances and exits, and play their parts in accordance with motives and passions which have a real existence in the human heart. . . . In the older novels, the reader, on the first introduction of a personage, was generally favored with a minute account of his character, which indeed he could not have learned by any other method, a part, by the way, which veteran devourers of novels were apt to skip, and most persons forget before they had made much progress. Authors at present avoid committing themselves in this way, and prefer leaving it to the reader's ingenuity to discover the character of each by his language and conduct. . . . One consequence of this new method is that as the characters are or are intended to be

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1825. 21. 78. The novels reviewed were M. Murgatroyd's *The Refugee*, L. M. Child's *Hobomok*, Harriet V. Cheney's *Peep at the Pilgrims in 1636*, *The Witch of New England*, *Saratoga*, *Adsonville*, *A Winter in Washington*, *Tales of An American Landlord*, *O'Halloran*, and *Goslington Shadow*.

¹⁸ 1824. 1. 168

¹⁹ 1825. 1. 337

drawn from real life, the story not infrequently is totally destitute of a regular, impeccable, and all-accomplished hero or heroine. But these inimitable patterns of square-toed perfection are now regarded as very uninteresting fellows. . . .

The natural or artificial objects, amid which the incidents occur, must likewise be delineated with that force of coloring and minute accuracy of detail which identify the particular scene of action, and for want of which, the same forests have frowned, and the same dungeons yawned for thousands of heroes to seek their recesses, and the same ruinous stairways and corridors echoed, while the self-moving clock struck one, to fright the souls of countless heroines. . . . This requisition imposes upon modern authors the necessity of actually seeing the places which they intend to describe. . . .

The question of the technique of the historical novel did not receive the attention one would expect it to get in a period which developed that form of fiction. Some of the critics perceived that an historical novel must, above all, recreate the character of a period, and that it is not necessary to describe real events and people with historical accuracy. But a good deal of the discussion centered on the question whether real personages should be described at all, since the reader inevitably compares the fictional portrait with the historical reality. Cooper was eternally quarreling with his reviewers over matters of accuracy and anachronism, his point of view being that some departures from strict historical accuracy were permissible, and that "sound and convenience" are more important than literal truth.²⁰

With mere historical narrative the critics had little patience. A reviewer of Mrs. Child's *The Rebels*²¹ called it a "mere copy from real history, a narrative of events possessing an interest which fiction can do little to heighten, a repetition of political sentiments which we find expressed with far more force and eloquence in the writings of Adams and Quincy." But usually the objection was directed against the portrayal of real personages. Gardiner thought that

²⁰ Preface to *The Prairie*, 1827

²¹ *North American Review*, 1826 22. 400

Cooper was not successful in his mingling of history and fiction, and that his historical personages were impossible. He liked the *Prairie* because in it Cooper did not deal with real people.²² Somewhat earlier a reviewer said of Mrs. Child's *Hobomok*:²³

We are persuaded the author of *Hobomok* would have succeeded better had he made it entirely a work of fancy, so far as characters and incidents are concerned, and merely attempted to illustrate the circumstances, situation, and manners of our forefathers and the scenery of our country.

The *American Quarterly Review* found that the principal fault of our writers of romances was their tendency to ape Scott in trying to work legends and impossible adventures into their narratives. A reviewer of *York Town*²⁴ said that the author's imitation of Meg Merrilies was a flat failure in that the character was not American; that America has had no dark or romantic age to which we may go for superstitions; and that our history is very real and must be treated as such. The business of modern romance is

. . . to embellish history and make tradition more probable by arranging a series of events and causes, so as more naturally or interestingly to bring about the catastrophe. Its best, if not its only support, is the belief of mankind, or at least [an] acceptance voluntarily accorded.

The *Quarterly's* best discussion of the genre was in a review of Bird's *Cavalier*.²⁵ It found Mexican history a rich field for romance, and praised Bird's use of it. It defined romance as novelty which addresses itself to the imagination, through either the heart or the head. The romanticist must try to express the spirit of the age he is describing; he must not use too much custom and costume; his dialogue must be a fair transcript of the language of the period; he must have a keen knowledge of character, and his personages must be well individualized.

²² *Ibid.*, 1826. 23. 150

²⁴ 1827. 2. 19

²³ *Ibid.*, 1824. 19. 262

²⁵ 1834. 16. 375

On the whole, the criticism of this type of fiction was inadequate, and though some of the critics might have believed, with W. B. O. Peabody of the *North American Review*,²⁶ that the Waverly novels had proved historical romance to be the best form of the novel, it is apparent that most of them were dissatisfied with American performance in that field. The most representative critics of the day wanted classicism, and more particularly they wanted a classicism which dealt with society as most of them knew it. As early as 1808 the *Monthly Anthology* had praised Brackenridge for his satires on contemporary life.²⁷ Maria Edgeworth's work was praised as much for its classicism as for its "wholesome" didacticism. Had Jane Austen been made known to Americans by the English reviewers she would have delighted the critics of the period, for her materials were just as familiar as those of the contemporary English "society" novelists and her moral attitude was much purer. Before Scott became widely popular, the *North American Review* had declared itself in favor of fictional studies of contemporary life. In 1816 the reviewer of a novel called *Rhoda*²⁸ praised it as a representation of manners and said that fiction is the great medium for recording life. In 1818 Willard Phillips lauded Miss Edgeworth for her treatment of real life.²⁹

Then came Cooper, and Gardiner's article on American romance in 1821. During the next few years the market was flooded with historical fiction from the pens of Cooper, John Neal, Catherine Sedgwick, Lydia Maria Child, Paulding, Dr. McHenry, and a number of anonymous authors. Then a reaction set in. In 1825 Bryant reviewed Miss Sedgwick's *Redwood*, a novel of New England manners,³⁰ in an article which was the first eloquent plea for classicism. He found it remarkable that an author should choose contemporary material at a time when the public was demanding romance,

²⁶ 1831 32. 386

²⁸ 1816 3. 216

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1825. 20 245

²⁷ 1808 5 498, 554

³⁰ 1818. 6 153

for striking incidents and excitement are enough for most readers, and by keeping the reader's curiosity aroused an author can cover up his technical weakness. But in fiction of contemporary life, there can be no false color or distortion. "We want to be delighted with the development of traits that have escaped our observation, or of which we have never felt the significance." Such works as these require greater art than romance. America is rich in materials for such fiction. "Wherever there are human nature and society, there are objects for the novelist. The passions and affections, virtue and vice, are of no country. . . . They not only exist everywhere, but they exist infinitely diversified. . . ." It has been said that Americans are so occupied with business that the country has no class of people who have time for the activity and intrigue necessary for novel material. But distinctions of social rank are not necessary to make a story interesting. We are getting tired of such fiction. We long for something "which is natural, the unfeigned traits of strength and weakness, of the tender and the comic, all of which the pride of rank either removes from observation or obliterates." In America, social distinctions being faint, there is opportunity to observe people clearly. "Whoever will take the pains to pursue this subject a little into its particulars will be surprised at the infinite variety of forms of character which springs up under the institutions of our country." Religious toleration makes possible the variations in character arising from creed and worship. Geographical variety offers a multiplicity of social usages, such as one finds in the city, the frontier, the southern plantation, and the foreign settlements. Fugitives from Europe form interesting and colorful lower classes. All of these are opportunities for the novelist.

Meanwhile, some of the critics began to revolt against Indian stories. A critic of *The Last of the Mohicans*³¹ said that Indians were not a fit subject for literature because their character was too simple and prosaic. Grenville Mellen of the

³¹ *American Athenaeum*, New York, 1826 1 441

North American said that Indians were poor material for the fiction of a civilized people. "We belong as a people to the English school of civilization. . . . It is enough that we represent our characters and manners at home and abroad."³²

In the same magazine, Willard Phillips praised John Galt's sketches of Scottish life in *Lawrie Todd*,³³ and George Hillard criticized Miss Sedgwick's romanticizing of familiar life in her *Clarence*.³⁴ In 1834 W. H. Prescott, in his essay "English Literature of the 19th Century,"³⁵ criticized Cooper for complaining that America is deficient in materials for society novels, saying that Cooper was incapable of depicting society. The same writer said in an essay on Cervantes that the proper study of the dramatic writer is man as he exists in society.

Two of the more important novelists of the period were obviously classicists, though their material was often romantic, and both of them derive from the tradition of Fielding. J. K. Paulding imitated the form of *Tom Jones* in several of his novels, and declared in his *Sketches of Old England* (1822), that Scott was not the equal of Fielding, and that fiction of present-day life demands nice observation, keen discrimination of character, and judgment, as compared with the historical novel, all of the material for which can be found in books. J. P. Kennedy was likewise a disciple of Fielding, and in his novels of historical and regional life his emphasis was always upon manners, customs, and character.

The realistic reaction in England produced novels of high life which American critics reviewed with interest, but unfortunately the classicism of Disraeli and Bulwer-Lytton was not to American taste. Their novels were full of flashy cynicism and easy morals, and thus could not get by the barriers of American moral standards. The *American Quarterly Review* devoted most of the space in a review of *Almack's, or Fashionable Life*³⁶ to an attack on the social conditions which

³² 1828. 27. 143

³⁴ 1831. 32. 73

³⁶ 1827. 1. 222

³³ 1830. 31. 380

³⁵ 1832. 35. 165

the novel described. Its review of several of Bulwer's novels in 1830³⁷ was merely an occasion for sermonizing against the social and political dangers of Byronism. *The Christian Examiner* likewise was disturbed by the new society novels, and the novels of Bulwer gave it the opportunity to clarify its position on the moral tone of fiction. Moreover, it attacked Fielding and all his followers on the ground that "The low, the vulgar, the obscene . . . are not fitting elements of literature. They are no part of human nature." ³⁸ At the same time, the *Examiner* was an admirer of literature of common life, and its most distinguished critic, W. E. Channing, praised Wordsworth, Scott, and Dickens because all three of them dealt with the life of the common people.³⁹

But these adherents of classicism did not desire an unmodified realistic treatment of classical materials; they insisted on a selectivity which eliminated certain objectionable elements. These elements were pessimism, radicalism, "low" details, and "immorality" of any kind. The objection to political radicalism I have spoken of elsewhere. It was responsible for the almost universal rejection of Godwin's novels, and it rarely failed to call forth, in reviews of C. B. Brown's works, reproofs for the radicalism in that writer's early work. Typical of such objections is the first part of W. H. Prescott's excellent "Memoirs of Charles Brockden Brown" (1834). The same objections appear in the *American Quarterly Review's* articles on Bulwer-Lytton.

The objections to pessimism and morbidity were called forth by Gothicism, both the old variety and the newer kind called the Malign, which was practised by Dana and which was to be most artistically developed by Poe and Hawthorne. About 1830 the public began to acquire a taste for the "Blackwood's type of tale steeped in 'Germanism and gloom.'" ⁴⁰ In that year the *Christian Examiner* remarked on the prevailing taste for tales of horror and crime in the maga-

³⁷ 1830. 8. 93

³⁸ 1830. 9. 227

³⁹ "The Present Age," 1841

⁴⁰ F. L. Pattee *Development of the American Short Story*, p. 124

zines.⁴¹ Four years later it reviewed Dana's works^{41a} and acknowledged a "fearful interest" in "Tom Thornton" and "Paul Felton," romantic stories of villainy and insanity. The critic (C. C. Felton) liked his treatment of the horrible in his long poem, "The Buccaneer," but felt that crime is not the best of subjects, and deprecated the general tendency of his fiction. Concerning "Tom Thornton"—"We gather from it nothing to console or elevate us. It begins in mischief, it ends in crime, in blood, in madness, and death. As a representation of human life, it is therefore strangely deficient. The author has taken one idea, one abstract quality, out from the multitude that form a man, and worked it up, with marvellous power, into a being neither probable nor possible. The lesson we learn from it, if we learn any, is a bad one, and contradicts the general experience of mankind." As to "Paul Felton"—"We do not think that such works come within the legitimate scope of creative art. They leave on the mind an impression of unmixed, unmitigated gloom. They do not represent man as he is, scarcely as he can be."

Disquisitions on the subject were infrequent, though Maturin's novels attracted some attention, principally unfavorable. It may be said in general that the critics did not like the older type of terror-tale, and accepted the newer type only when it was morally wholesome. The *American Quarterly Review*, for instance, said of Dana's poems, "The passions and crimes of a villain, his mad career, his ruin, are a noble and moral subject of fiction in any form, and we call the delicacy that is offended by such a representation, squeemishness and bad taste."⁴² It is to be observed that in neither of these criticisms is there any interest in the purely artistic problem of atmosphere, and the difference between the two is a difference in moral quality. The *Examiner's* moralism was simply more idealistic.

The same restrictive idealism appears in the *North American's* review of Eliza Leslie's too caustic *Pencil Sketches, or Outlines of Character and Manners*.⁴³ This article illustrates

⁴¹ 1830. 9. 46

⁴² 1828. 3. 118

^{41a} 1834. 15. 392

⁴³ 1833. 37. 466

perfectly how far the critic was willing to go with the realist. American criticism simply would not put up with any representation of social life which might lead to misanthropy or skepticism. According to this critic (W. B. O. Peabody), "Whoever undertakes, then, to give sketches of life . . . must be careful to set these things in their true light, and to allow to each its just proportion, so that the whole impression conveyed by his writings shall be decidedly in favor of benevolence."

Another restrictive influence on classicism was the moral attitude of the critics. That attitude, however, had undergone several changes. Up to 1810 the tendency was to brand all fictional representations of life as unwholesome. From 1810 to 1820 the work of Maria Edgeworth received the almost unanimous approval of the critics partly because of her announced effort to blend amusement with instruction. She was generally ranked with Scott, and it must be said in her favor that her didacticism did much to break down prejudice against fiction. Reviewing her *Patronage* in 1814 the *Portfolio*⁴⁴ remarked that it disliked to notice novels at all, but that it was useless to reason with the public. Most novelists are dangerous, but Miss Burney, Mrs. Opie, and Miss Edgeworth are exceptions. Indeed, her work is the best since Fielding, and it is even better than his work because it deals with real life in such a way as to lead to great moral conclusions.

She understands as well as any one how to make an advantageous distribution of the virtues and vices, the foibles and accomplishments, among the characters necessary to the conduct of her plot without overdoing any of them. . . . [She] makes her heroes and heroines sufficiently excellent, and her disturbers of happiness sufficiently odious, without making up her *dramatis personae* of angels or of devils.

The *American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review* was similarly pleased over her judicious arrangement of moral justice:⁴⁵

In the creation of fancy, the author is the arbiter of events, and it is his own fault if he do not contrive them to fulfill the course

⁴⁴ 1814. IV. 4. 163

⁴⁵ 1817. I. 413

of justice. . . . [The reader] watches the progress of the plot, and is only satisfied with an eventual distribution of rewards and punishments proportionate to the deserts or demerits of the parties. His expectations are defeated when this apportionment is not observed, and so far as he lends himself to the illusion, dissatisfaction and distrust of providence follow disappointment. It will perhaps be asked why the same sentiments do not grow out of actual as well as ideal suffering, it being admitted that, in fact, the order of justice is often apparently inverted in the temporal lot of mankind. To this we may reply that we do not know any existing individuals as intimately as the hero of the tale—we have not the whole tenor of their feelings and conduct developed to us, and we cannot tell how far they have merited their calamities. We are not therefore so forcibly struck with a sense of their cruelty. But it is a wanton infliction to heap distresses upon innocence in the pages of a novel. We have too frequent occasions to call in the assistance of religion to enable us to submit to inevitable dispensations, and it is worse than idle to tempt our patience with imaginary evils.

These remarks throw light on the conception of fictional art which existed before Scott's ascendancy, as well as on the earnest but misguided morality of that period. Many of the critics appeared to believe that fiction must be either immoral or didactic, and the idea lingered until Scott proved that it need be neither. At any rate, the better known Scott's work became, the less the critics thought of Miss Edgeworth. Six years after its eulogy of Miss Edgeworth, the *Portfolio* printed an article on the "Progress of Novel-Writing"⁴⁶ which indicated both a consciousness that the novel was a literary form to be reckoned with, and a dissatisfaction with Miss Edgeworth's methods. "Her imagination is collective rather than creative . . . not characterized by . . . that incommunicable power which generates worlds for itself . . . but by that power which can extract, accumulate, amplify, and condense " But (and this is said almost apologetically) her characters are too good and prudent to get the reader's sympathy. Some infirmities and some stronger passions would make them more attractive.

⁴⁶ 1820. V 9 266

By 1823 the *North American Review*, in a review of a six-volume Boston edition of her works,⁴⁷ could call her "the great forgotten" and bury her with the remark that she was the instructress of her generation. In the same periodical nine years later, so conservative a critic as W. H. Prescott, reviewing English literature of the nineteenth century, judged that her heavy moralizing marred her artistic accomplishment,⁴⁸ and still another critic said in a review of her *Helen* that a primarily didactic purpose is incompatible with art.⁴⁹ Thereafter the critics were content to go to other sources for sermons, and though they were always on the lookout for overt immorality, they tended to take the more modern point of view that in art instruction must always be implicit and that the first aim of fiction must be to represent life. This new moralism was best expressed by the *Christian Examiner* in a review of Bulwer,⁵⁰ which denied that the meting out of poetic justice to fictional characters was sufficient, in that there was no such justice in nature. It is the novelist's duty to avoid the representation of profligacy of character and manners as well as "stiff and ungainly goodness," and to secure the reader's regard for the characters in proportion to their merit.

Meanwhile the critics had begun to devote some attention to the question of the form of the novel, though of such discussion there was altogether too little. As in other fields of literature, they insisted on unity, but they were at first not very sure what fictional form was. The more conservative of them reverted to Fielding's theories about the relationship between fiction and the epic, and, as one might expect, Dr. McHenry attacked the whole school of modern romancers in an article entitled "Novels Without Plots."⁵¹

Half a generation ago, the orthodox opinion was that the novel, like the epic, must have unity of plot, a beginning, a middle, and an end, which should carry hero and heroine through a variety of interesting adventures from which the reader should at last

⁴⁷ 1823. 17. 383

⁴⁸ 1832 35 165

⁴⁹ 1834 39. 167

⁵⁰ 1829 6 173

⁵¹ *American Monthly Magazine*, 1824 1. 193

feel both relieved and rejoiced to find them delivered. In conformity with this doctrine, Dr. Blair eulogized *Tom Jones* chiefly on account of the artful manner in which all the incidents are made to contribute to the winding up of the plot.

Before *Waverly*, no one dared to write an uninteresting story. "To narrate adventures seemed to be the business of the novelist." But modern writers merely sketch scenes and draw character. They consider plot old-fashioned, and cite Scott as authority. All this applies to Galt, Hogg, Neal, and Cooper.

Unfortunately, this critic was also a novelist, and it is amusing to note that in the very year he made this plea for form, the *Atlantic Magazine* said of his *O'Halloran*, in an article called "The Doctor McHenry School of Romance":⁶² "The plot seems to be made up as it goes along, which is indeed the most natural way, and the same in which events usually turn up in the world we live in."

Other critics, though less insistent on epic formality than Dr. McHenry, complained of the lack of unity in contemporary productions. Gardiner said of *Hobomok*⁶³ that it contained too many characters which did not contribute to unity of action. Sparks complained of the profusion of characters and incidents in American historical romances.⁶⁴ The *United States Literary Gazette* said in a review of *The Pilot*,⁶⁵ "We think any work of the imagination may be the better for some regard to the unities of place, time, and action," and the *Analectic*, in a general attack on cheap fiction, remarked:

... the threads of the fabric are not interlaced and run into each other like the real conduct and events of the world, but are employed to sew the different incidents to one another in a clumsy though gorgeous patchwork. Unfortunately, however, these very productions are exhibited to eyes as little capable as the authors themselves to perceive anything artificial or uneven in the conjunctions by which the piece is held together. And thus it happens

⁶² 1824, 1, 210

⁶³ *North American Review*, 1824, 19, 262

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 1825, 21, 95

⁶⁵ 1824, 1, 6

that notwithstanding the constant violation of nature in the great body of novels, they are a species of literary work more abundantly and more extensively circulated than perhaps any other whatsoever.⁵⁶

Of interest in this connection is the objection of the critics to philosophical discussions in novels. Most of them said that such digressions marred unity, but since these protests invariably appeared in reviews of C. B. Brown's novels, one can safely assume that the critics' concern was not entirely disinterested and æsthetic in motive.

A few critics managed to achieve enough perspective to discuss the novel in the larger aspects of its literary character, and in these cases the point of view was directly opposed to that of Dr. McHenry. The feeling was that the form was better off unencumbered by rules, and that characterization was far more important than plot. The most intelligent of this group was W. H. Prescott, who, inquiring into the popularity of novel-writing among English peoples, assigned the cause to the fact that unlike France, which loved narrow rules of criticism, England had allowed the novel to grow freely, molding it only according to the needs of characterization, in which the Anglo-Saxon excels.⁵⁷ In another article he said that the novel had displaced the drama because its form and length permitted better and more philosophical analysis of character. "The English have too little respect for rules and . . . external form . . . to sacrifice to it in any degree the main purpose of characterization."⁵⁸

Further evidence of the acceptance of the novel as a serious form of literature lies in the general admission that fiction may be "true to nature," and that it belongs "to the department of poetry and . . . must be tried by the same laws."⁵⁹ By the end of the period, criticism had accepted the novel unreservedly, and in 1835 the *American Quarterly Review* admitted that "the best genius of the age is going into fic-

⁵⁶ 1817. 9. 30

⁵⁷ *North American Review*, 1827 25 190, 191

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1832 35 187

⁵⁹ *Christian Examiner*, 1829 6 176

tion," and recognized the necessity for some settled principles.⁶⁰

One special fictional form—the short story—received its first recognition in the criticism of this period. We are accustomed to think of Poe's review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* (1842) as the first critique of that form. It was, indeed, the first American statement of the principle of preconceived effect, which, according to Margaret Alterton,⁶¹ derived ultimately from A. W. Schlegel through *Blackwood's*. But Poe's principle was drawn not from contemporary American short-story practice, but from his own original development of the form. Before 1835 the short story was usually amorphous, and was rarely thought of by either writer or critic as different from the novel in anything but length. It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that a few critics should have tried to establish for it certain differentiating principles. Their method was of necessity empirical, and therefore the principles they arrived at varied with changing short-story technique.

An early point of view is represented in an article reprinted from the *Eclectic Review* by the *Analectic*.⁶² This was a review of one of the numerous didactic tales for children. The critic asked, What is the difference between a Tale and a Novel? Is it that a tale is supposed to be a shorter and less labored production than a novel; that a tale is designed to relate the natural occurrences and simple incidents of life; while a novel sets real life and probability at defiance, and demands, as its essential features, a heroine, a plot, a lover, and a catastrophe? How comes it that novels are, with few exceptions, the most pernicious in tendency of any works; while under the generic title of Tales we have some of the most instructive and profound compositions in the language?

But as to the variety of Moral Tales, Simple Tales, Tales of Real Life, etc. which have since sought to escape, under these false titles, the sweeping condemnation bestowed upon novels and romances, they have had their day. The intention of the authors of

⁶⁰ 1835. 18 441

⁶² 1816. 8 57

⁶¹ *Origin of Poe's Critical Theory*

some of them was doubtless good, but they were not qualified to be moral teachers. They might be acquainted with life, but they wanted that key to human nature—a knowledge of their own hearts.

This critic's effort to establish a difference on the basis of content and moral tone was simply a reflection of the state of fiction of that day. He had no knowledge, apparently, of the history of the tale, and no appreciation of the possibilities of the form.

Criticism had to wait upon creation, and therefore no good analysis appeared until after the publication of Irving's *Sketch Book* (1819-1820). But even then criticism was slow. W. H. Prescott's article on "Essay Writing" in the *North American*⁶³ shows no perception of the connection between the tale and the essay-sketch. It was Irving himself who first defined the tale in a letter written in 1824:⁶⁴

I fancy much of what I value myself upon in writing escapes the observation of the great mass of my readers, who are intent more upon the story than the way in which it is told. For my part, I consider a story merely as a frame on which to stretch my materials. It is the play of thought, and sentiment, and language, the weaving in character, lightly, yet expressively delineated; the familiar and faithful exhibition of scenes of common life; and the half-concealed vein of humour that is often playing through the whole—these are among what I aim at, and upon which I felicitate myself in proportion as I think I succeed. I have preferred adopting the mode of sketches and short tales rather than long works, because I choose to take a line of writing peculiar to myself, rather than fall into the manner of any other writer.

There is a constant activity of thought and a nicety of execution required in writings of this kind, more than the world appears to imagine. It is comparatively easy to swell a story to any size when you have once the scheme and characters in your mind, the mere interest of the story, too, carries the reader on through pages and pages of careless writing, and the author may be dull for half a volume at a time if he has some striking scene at the end of

⁶³ 1822. 14. 319

⁶⁴ Pierre Irving *Life and Letters of Washington Irving*, N Y., 1862, II 226

it; but in these shorter writings every page must have its merit . . . woe to him if he makes an awkward sentence or writes a stupid page. . . . Yet if he succeed, the very variety and piquancy of his writings—nay, their very brevity, make them frequently referred to, and when the mere interest in the story is exhausted he begins to get credit for his touches of pathos or humor; his points of wit or turns of language.

Here, then, is recognition of the necessity of workmanship and careful attention to detail. It is true that there is no mention of unity or general effect, but these were not Irving's strong points.

The only other statement of importance appeared in Bryant's *New York Review* in 1825 in a review of *National Tales*.⁶⁵ Differentiating between novels and tales, the critic said that the latter require talents of a peculiar, though lesser, kind. They do not call for as much development of character and fullness of description and dialogue, but they do require greater vivacity of narration, and more point and polish of style. Tediousness in them is unforgivable, and negligence and heaviness of manner is not so readily overlooked. One is a miniature, the other is a full-length picture. Plot is important in both, though in each it calls for a different execution. The critic concluded with a short history of the tale from Boccaccio to Irving.

These remarks were obviously based on the short story as it was written after the arrival of the *Sketch Book*, and are a fair statement of the best practice in the form during the period just before Poe. They are, perhaps, evidence that criticism can do no more than keep up with creation.

* * * * *

Can any conclusions be drawn as to the relationship between criticism of fiction in this period and the nature of fiction in the next? The three great figures of the period 1835-1860 were Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. Poe's chief contribution to technique was the development of atmosphere and close-knit plot construction. In the preceding

⁶⁵ 1825. 2. 32

period there was hardly a mention of either, though there was a general demand for unity and workmanship. Hawthorne's chief contribution was the use of symbolism. To this fictional device there were, before 1835, few references. Robert Walsh, reviewing Goethe's *Elective Affinities* in 1812,⁶⁶ said of an episode in which a cloud passed in front of the moon just before a lady was visited with misfortune, that it was an example of superstition. W. E. Channing, on the other hand, recognized Goethe's method in *Wilhelm Meister* as symbolistic.⁶⁷ But that was in 1827. In the fifteen years between, Wordsworth taught America concerning the correspondences between the material and moral worlds, and it is to him that much of the credit must be given for the use of symbolism in romantic fiction.⁶⁸ Melville, likewise, made a distinctive use of symbolism, a deeper and more philosophical use than either Poe or Hawthorne. For his great prose rhythms, Melville was not indebted in any way to either the criticism or the fiction of the preceding period.

The chief principles which evolved out of the earlier period were that romantic materials are best when treated realistically, and classical materials best when treated idealistically. These ideas are occasionally to be observed at work in the fiction of Hawthorne and Melville, but it was not until after 1860 that they were given authority by the theory and practice of Howells and James.

⁶⁶ *American Review of History and Politics*, 1812, 3: 5.

⁶⁷ E. P. Peabody, *Reminiscences*, p. 331.

⁶⁸ Hawthorne's use of symbolism is generally attributed to his reading of Spenser and Bunyan. There can be little doubt, however, that his treatment of nature was affected by a knowledge of Wordsworth. See Randall Stewart's edition of the *American Notebooks*, New Haven, 1932, pp. lxxxviii, 324, xcvi.

VIII

CRITICISM, MAGAZINES, AND CRITICS

I. CRITICISM

THE FORM AND the spirit of the American "book review" was largely determined by its purpose, which was judicial. That circumstance explains the long introductory disquisitions on morals and political soundness which were an open warning that the book under review was not to be judged by literary method alone; it had, first and foremost, to pass the various social tests. But another, equally important, circumstance was the tone of the Scotch rhetorics from which the critics had learned their rules. Blair and Kames had inculcated in their readers the habit of cold and rational analysis of virtues and defects. They had inhibited enthusiasm by their insistence that literature must be judged according to the rules which have been discovered by analysis of the taste of the generality of mankind. Blair said plainly in his second lecture that the man of correct taste "estimates with propriety the comparative merit of the several beauties which he meets with in any work of genius; he refers them to their proper classes; assigns the principles, as far as they can be traced, whence this power of pleasing flows; and is pleased himself precisely in that degree in which he ought, and no more." Such a point of view made enthusiasm a critical sin.

By 1845 critics had begun to discern the unsuitability of such technique for the criticism of romantic literature; it was tenable only as long as "the several beauties" remained constant, but when the romantics burst forth with undreamed-of glories, the Scottish critic was helpless. C. A. Bristed, in the *American Review* for 1845, exposed the shortcomings of Scotch criticism in an article entitled "The Scotch

School of Philosophy and Criticism,"¹ wherein he charged that the Scots lacked creativeness and constructiveness. They could analyze but not synthesize: they lacked imagination, were not susceptible to shadowy influences, could not perceive the mysterious affinities of the spirit.

These are valid objections, and late in our period there were, in certain magazines, perceptible tendencies in the direction of appreciative criticism. But judicial criticism performed valuable services in the period of the incubation of romanticism. It established a tradition of "social" critical tests which persisted throughout the more enthusiastic criticism of the later nineteenth century; it toned down the excesses of certain kinds of romanticism; it kept the necessity for good workmanship alive in the minds of writers. Moreover, it had a solid objectivity, which, if it is not pleasing to modern æsthetic taste, was valuable alike to its contemporaries and to students of the period.

Two other circumstances help to explain the nature of this early criticism. First, it served to acquaint readers with books which were too scarce or too expensive to buy. Popular fiction and poetry was, of course, available in the circulating and mercantile libraries, and it was "noticed," as it was published, by the weeklies and the newspapers. But foreign, philosophical, and historical works of the heavier variety were not available to everyone. Therefore the quarterlies and the monthlies not only judged them, but printed long excerpts and summaries. The *North American*, for example, said in its review of Casanova's *Memoirs*² that it was reviewing the volume because there were only three copies of it in America. The *American Quarterly* said in a review of Bryant³ that the writer would take much pleasure in quoting more, but "the book is neither scarce nor dear," and the *Cincinnati Literary Gazette* apologized for the amount of excerpt it offered from Cooper's *The Pilot* with the explanation that there was only one copy of the book in the city.⁴ Sometimes,

¹ 1845 2. 386

² 1836 20. 516

³ 1835. 41. 46

⁴ 1824. 1. 49

of course, long excerpts seemed only to make up for a critic's laziness, as when the *American Quarterly* said of Irving's *Columbus*,⁵ "The copious quotations we have made . . . will be sufficient to relieve us in a great degree from the necessity of criticism"

The second fact is that the reviews served an educational purpose. In spite of efforts in France and America at the end of the eighteenth century to modernize school curricula, the history of literatures was rarely taught in American schools and universities. Accordingly, most of the quarterlies prefaced their reviews with histories of the literature of the various subject matters. If, then, the reviews seem dry to us, we must remember that they were performing an important service for their contemporaries. As a force in the spread of knowledge and culture they cannot be ignored. But the method was not universal, and is rather characteristic of the quarterlies than of the monthlies. The *Portfolio*, for instance, called it "new style" reviewing, and was sarcastic about the *North American's* use of it;⁶ and Willis' *American Monthly* deplored the habit of making reviews occasions for general essays.⁷ But Willis was a pioneer in the new appreciative criticism.

Let us see the effect of the need of excerpt and historical information upon some representative reviews in the *American Quarterly*. A review of *Euphemia*, a translation of an Italian tragedy by Pellico,⁸ begins with the Schlegelian question, why such a romantic and passionate race should produce drama so formal and declamatory. This is followed by twenty-two pages of history of Italian tragedy, very careful and detailed; four pages of excerpt and summary; and one short paragraph of actual criticism of the play. Another review of some American plays⁹ begins with one page of comment on drama in general, continues with fifteen pages of history of English drama, followed by some remarks on the need of a native American drama, and concludes with ten pages of

⁵ 1831 9 184

⁶ 1823, V 18 118

⁷ 1829 1 323

⁸ 1834 15. 351

⁹ 1830 8. 134

excerpt, summary, and comment on the plays. The novel called for a different method, because readers were more familiar with its history in England, and because the popularity of the form necessitated more judicious watchfulness. A review of *York Town*¹⁰ began with ten pages of discussion of English novels which were being imitated by Americans and which did not come up to the critic's standard of political and moral purity. After seventeen pages, the critic got to *York Town* and subjected it to the test of American ideals. The remaining seventeen pages were divided between the novel itself and a list of desiderata in the American novel.

Naturally, this method varied according to critic and magazine, but in general the formula was a discussion of the applicable moral, social, political principles, plus biography or history, plus summary and excerpt, plus a varying but usually small amount of "the revelation of merits and the exposure of blemishes." Of lightness and playful irony, of the analysis of literary principles, of sheer enjoyment, there was little until the end of the third decade.

One other fact is significant: the magazines did not contain advertisements of books. This partly explains the downrightness of critical opinion. Of course there were charges of "puffing," and very likely some magazines had reasons for coöperating with publishers, but bias and favoritism can usually be accounted for by the machinations of cliques and by sectional pride and prejudice. These things, of course, must be taken into consideration in judging the criticism of the period, but usually ulterior motives are transparent. On the whole, criticism was remarkably honest.

2. PHILADELPHIA

Philadelphia was predominantly conservative. That was to be expected in view of the fact that Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania were fountain heads of Scotch realism. Moreover, the patrician attitude lasted longer in Philadelphia than in any other city. The spirit of the new democratic

¹⁰ 1827 2 19

America was rude and uncultivated, and after the triumph of the republicans Philadelphia clung more stubbornly than ever to the traditions of British culture. Its taste in literature was classical, and it followed the classical tradition as it was perpetuated by the *Quarterly* and *Edinburgh* reviews. Its criticism was distinctly judicial, but as such it was the best of its kind. Often it was querulous, but it was almost always vigorous.

The Portfolio,¹¹ (1801-1827)

How Dennie's political and social prejudices dominated the *Portfolio* in its first decade I have shown in other places, but during that period it had the honor of being the most thoroughly literary journal in America. It is peculiar that an editor so devoted to the principles of Johnson and Burke should have had something to say in favor of the early romantic "novelties"—the *Lyrical Ballads*, Southey's "epics," and Gothic novels and ballads. Indeed, it would seem that Scotch rhetorics had less influence on him than on any other editor of the time. One of his contributors, J. S. J. Gardiner, in an article in *The Tablet*, repudiated Blair as too general in method and declared allegiance to Johnson and to Ruffhead Owen, the mid-eighteenth century editor of Pope.¹² Moreover, Dennie was distinguished by his lack of bias in favor of American literature. In fact, he was willing to brave popular disapproval by criticizing Barlow's *Columbiad* as it deserved to be criticized.¹³ The outstanding characteristic of the *Portfolio* under Dennie is its English tone. Together with J. S. J. Gardiner, who was noted for his intense loyalty to England, he upheld the authority of English culture, and even resisted the coining of Americanisms and the growth of a new language. In that matter, Gardiner was the chief spokesman in his articles on philology.

As Dennie's articles were not signed, it is rather difficult to judge him except by the tone of the *Portfolio* during his régime. In 1810-1811 it had printed some criticisms of very

¹¹ See H. M. Ellis *Dennie and His Circle*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 82

¹³ 1809. III. 1. 59

high grade. Whether or not these were Dennie's I do not know. At any rate, the review of *The Lady of the Lake*¹⁴ was enthusiastic and original, and that of Southey's *Kehama* in the following year¹⁵ was a keen analysis of Southey's career, reputation, and literary methods. Technically, it is one of the best criticisms of the time.

As the *Portfolio* ceased its political bickering it became somewhat better. After Dennie's death in 1812 the magazine was noticeably more American in tone. It subdued its sectional jealousy enough to review the *Knickerbocker History* in the easy, jocular tone of that book. Meanwhile an able critic was writing penetrating criticisms of Scott's matter and manner.¹⁶ Under Charles Caldwell's editorship, 1814-1816, there was more good criticism. The review of Scott's *Lord of the Isles*¹⁷ contains an orderly analysis which takes up nine of the twenty-three pages of the article, an unusual proportion. Caldwell himself was an able reviewer, if we may judge by his analysis of Byron's versification and imagery in *Lara*.¹⁸

Under John E. Hall, who became later a professor of rhetoric and belles lettres, the *Portfolio* was less attractive. Too much of it was excerpt from histories of literature, too little had a vital bearing on the times. Nevertheless, Hall familiarized his readers with Sismondi, and rated A. W. Schlegel's *Lectures* "an epoch in the history of criticism."¹⁹ At this time the *Portfolio* came under the rule of Blair and Kames, whom Hall mentioned as critical authorities.²⁰ By 1820 the magazine had become largely eclectic, and except for some rather good articles on fiction it ceased to be distinguished.

The Analectic, (1813-1821)

This magazine, which contains many selections from foreign reviews, particularly the *Edinburgh*, was typically Scotch and conservative. It spoke respectfully of Blair, printed a

¹⁴ 1810 III. 4. 396

¹⁵ 1813. IV. 2. 10

¹⁶ 1815 IV. 6. 33

²⁰ 1818 V. 6. 90

¹⁵ 1811 III. 6. 513

¹⁷ 1815 IV. 6. 58

¹⁹ 1817. V. 3. 477

long review of Stewart by a New Haven trinitarian,²¹ and consistently opposed Hume and Berkeley. Its most distinguished articles are its attacks on Hazlitt,²² and its sympathetic discussion of Madame de Staël.²³ Generally its conservatism was intelligent, and, though it opposed new ideas, one is aware that its opposition was based on valid principles and that it usually understood the ideas of the innovators it attacked.

The new series, which began in 1820, contains no worthwhile criticism. I shall speak of the *Analectic's* New York contributors—Irving, Paulding, and Verplanck—in the proper place.

Robert Walsh, (1785-1859) and the American Quarterly Review (1827-1837)

Robert Walsh was a gentleman of culture. He was the son of an Irish peer and a Philadelphia Quakeress, was educated in Catholic colleges in Baltimore and Washington, traveled and studied in Europe, and practised law in Philadelphia until deafness made him turn to the literary profession. He contributed to the *Portfolio*. In 1811 his *Letter on the French Government* earned the praise of Jeffrey, and in the same year he founded, on the *Edinburgh* model, the first "Scottish" quarterly in America, the aim of which was "the propagation of sound political doctrines and the direction and improvement of the literary taste of the American people." This was the *American Review of History and Politics*, which lasted until 1812, and which reveals the nature of Walsh's thinking in the laudatory articles on Hamilton, on Dugald Stewart, and on Goethe. The last, a review of *Elective Affinities*,²⁴ shows that Walsh was one of the first critics able to read and to appreciate the new German literature. He objected to Goethe's obscurity and to his unreligious fatalism, but praised his style and Germany's contributions to science and scholarship.

²¹ 1816. 7. 41

²² 1813. 2. 177

²³ 1818. 11. 346, 12. 201

²⁴ 1812. 3. 51

His next venture was the *American Register, or Summary Review of History, Politics, and Literature*, 1817-1819, which contained little of literary interest except translations from Sismondi and Schlegel. Two other ventures had no more success. In 1827 he founded the *American Quarterly*.

From the beginning Walsh had been a champion of Americanism of the Federalistic variety. He believed in democracy, but he also believed that it was the duty of the upper classes to direct the thinking and the tastes of the mob. Unfortunately, his *Quarterly* was too heavy for the mob, and his literary taste remained neo-classical through the period when romanticism was taking hold on the public's imagination. Moreover, he allowed one of the worst reactionaries in America, Dr. McHenry, to write reviews of modern poetry which drew the derision of many northern journals. But his list of contributors was distinguished, and in matters where a liberal literary taste was not indispensable, his *Quarterly* did important work. George Bancroft reviewed historical works, James Renwick of Columbia wrote on science, Joseph Hopkinson on law, and Peter S. Du Ponceau on philology. The group produced some of the best scholarly criticism of the day.

The literary criticism was valuable for its factual content; in this it reflected Walsh's own interest in the historical study of literature on the new German lines. As for its Americanism, which was sometimes too aggressive, it must be said that it rarely puffed American works and that its policy was constructive. The review of Kettell's *Specimens of American Poetry*,²⁵ for instance, was scornful of the editor's idea that he could glorify America by printing all the trash it had written, and rebuked him for saying we were too dependent on England for our literary models, the truth being that we ought to go to the best English models for guidance. Its suggestions for nationalizing our literature were always reasonable and sometimes valuable.

In 1836, someone, I have not been able to find out who,²⁶

²⁵ 1829 6 210

²⁶ Possibly John W. Williams, who was an associate editor in the *Quarterly's* last years.

contributed a number of articles on romantic literature which I consider the best appreciative criticism of the period. It signalized a complete reversal of editorial policy; it was as though a new *Quarterly* had displaced the old. In that one year reviews were printed of Coleridge, Lamb, Shelley, and Wordsworth, which surpassed in form, style, and imaginative and intelligent grasp anything that was being done in New England. The writer of them deserves to be discovered. It is a pity that after such a rebirth, the *Quarterly* expired.

Walsh preserved some of his essays in a two-volume collection called *Didactics, Social, Literary and Political*, published in Philadelphia in 1836. It is a monument to the influence of Scotch philosophy and æsthetics on the American mind.

Dr. James McHenry and the American Monthly Magazine, (1824)

McHenry is worth recording only as an example of uncompromising reaction in a changing age. He was Irish, and eventually had to return to his own land after his invective had brought upon him a well-deserved avalanche of reprisal.

When, in 1824, he published his *American Monthly*, his point of view was still common enough to escape notice. The articles therein were conservative, but their tone was not offensive, and he was more concerned with setting forth his ideas than with attacking people for not agreeing with him. The references in it to the authority of Blair were frequent and respectful. But the *Monthly* soon failed and he turned to the writing of prose and fiction to show how it should be done. This was a mistake. The magazines of New York and Boston dismissed him with contempt. It is this circumstance, very likely, that accounts for the bitterness of his articles on American romantic poets in the *American Quarterly*. These were "American Lake Poetry" in 1832,²⁷ "The Decline of Poetry,"²⁸ and possibly "American Lyric Poetry."²⁹ Bryant, who thought Walsh wrote them, was enraged, and the *New*

²⁷ 1832. 11. 154

²⁸ 1834. 15. 448

²⁹ 1836. 19. 101

England Magazine,³⁰ the *American Monthly Review* (Cambridge),³¹ and the *Knickerbocker*³² attacked him savagely.

3. NEW ENGLAND

Although Boston trailed Philadelphia and New York in magazine production its criticism was, on the whole, the best of the period. In the first decade of the century it had not yet achieved a distinct literary character of its own, and the fact that Harvard sent Dennie and Gardiner to Philadelphia is, perhaps testimony to the homogeneity which Federalism gave to the criticism of the period. The *Monthly Anthology*, the *Literary Miscellany*, and the *Portfolio* were very similar in critical principle. In neither city did deism have any perceptible effect on criticism, and early unitarianism, if it may be judged in the *Monthly Anthology*, the *Literary Miscellany*, and the *General Repository*, was anything but a liberalizing influence in the world of literature. The only claim that can be made for this group of magazines is that it made literature a respectable avocation for clergymen.

But by 1817, romanticism had created dissensions which split New England critics into rival factions and gave Boston a literary character different from that of Philadelphia. Dana, Bryant, and Longfellow represented the new susceptibility to certain romantic ideas and modes. After Dana's literary radicalism disrupted the critical peace of the *North American*, the younger group wrote for the *United States Literary Gazette*, which latter made alliances with the magazines of the young Knickerbockers. Toward the end of the period, the *North American* dropped into mere learnedness, and a group of new magazines in Boston took the responsibility of keeping abreast of the times. By 1830 unitarianism had acquired enough vitality to be a literary force, and the *Christian Examiner* made a satisfactory adjustment between theology and romanticism. In these magazines Wordsworth and Coleridge

³⁰ 1832. 2 490

³¹ 1832. 1 427

³² 1834. 4 11

received their first intelligent consideration, and in them some of the relationships between English romanticism and American idealism were clearly defined.

*The North American Review, (1815-current)*³³

The story of how the *North American* grew out of the *Monthly Anthology* (1801-1811) and the Anthology Society has often been told.³⁴ Suffice to say that the editors, contributors, and members of the Society developed in different directions after the *Anthology* died. The *North American* from the very beginning differed from its parent in that it devoted itself to the sponsorship of American literature and to the discouragement of indiscriminate imitation of English authors and models. During William Tudor's editorship, this work was done largely by Walter Channing, but Tudor himself inaugurated, with a review of *The Simple Cobbler*, a "Books Relating to America" series. Edward Everett reviewed German literature, and the tone of the periodical was, in the beginning, distinctively contemporary. But Tudor's interests were not primarily literary,³⁵ and when Willard Phillips took over control in 1817 the temper of the magazine changed. The work of Phillips, Dana, and Bryant in the next few years was the best and most liberal of the period. Indeed it was too liberal to be representative, and after Dana had offended the subscribers in 1819 by denying Pope the qualities of a poet, the *Review* settled down to the conservatism of Edward Everett. But this conservatism took on authority and intelligence in the work of A. H. Everett and W. H. Prescott, who did the best reviewing in the next ten years. Samuel Gilman gave vigorous expression to the *Review's* policy regarding romanticism in his criticism of Percival in

³³ Indexed by William Cushing, Cambridge, 1878. The Index gives the names of the critics.

³⁴ See Mott, p. 253, see also the *Journal of the Proceedings* of the Society, with introduction by M. A. DeWolfe Howe, Boston, 1910, which contains a careful index of subjects and contributors.

³⁵ He reprinted some of his essays in his *Miscellanies*, Boston, 1821.

1823;³⁶ the scholars—Prescott, Gray, and Bancroft—established the new German historical approach to criticism; W. H. Gardiner did distinctive work in the criticism of the American novel; and A. H. Everett and Andrews Norton disposed of Byronism.

After 1830, under the domination of the Peabodys, it became less interesting, though the occasional work of Longfellow, G. H. Calvert, and R. C. Watterston was often important. In this period it was outclassed by the new Boston periodicals. The criticisms of Cheever were an indication that the *Review* was to follow the conservative unitarians rather than the more radical ones sponsored by the *Christian Examiner*.

Willard Phillips, (1784-1873)

This critic has never been given recognition, yet his work is distinguished by a freshness of point of view which never aroused the opposition of conservatives because he never expressed himself belligerently, as did Dana. By background and training he was himself a conservative. He entered Harvard in 1806, where he probably heard John Quincy Adams' lectures on rhetoric, and graduated with honors in 1810. From 1811 to 1815 he tutored at Harvard; in 1818 he began the practice of law and became a member of the state legislature in 1825. An eminent legal scholar in the fields of insurance, criminology, and tariffs, he was typical of his time in that he kept in touch with American culture throughout his career. When he was an instructor at Harvard he planned, with President Kirkland and E. T. Channing, a publication to be called *The New England Magazine and Review*, but the scheme was dropped when William Tudor founded the *North American*.³⁷ He was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Science, and owner, with Parsons, of the *New England Galaxy* from 1828 to 1834. He kept a diary and voluminous notebooks (preserved in ms in the Harvard Library) which reflect wide reading.

³⁶ 1823 16. 102

³⁷ *North American Review*, 1915 201. 303

As a critic, he was one of those rare people who could welcome the new without antagonizing lovers of the old. He had keen insight into the central problems of romantic modes and matters. Phillips was possibly the first to recognize the beauty of "Thanatopsis," and it was he who accepted it for publication.³⁸ It was he, also, who urged Bryant to contribute to the *Review* articles on American poetry,³⁹ and in his enthusiastic review of Bryant's 1821 volume⁴⁰ he selected as his favorites the poems which have been best loved ever since.

In 1816 he stated a critical principle which seems unimportant today because it is so generally accepted but which in his day was held, or at least was perceived clearly enough to be uttered, by very few. This was his declaration in a review of Cowper,⁴¹ "That to judge rightly of an author, we must view objects from the position assumed by himself or that occupied by the generality of his readers. . . . We may condemn his choice of position and pronounce his views to be false," but it is our duty to put ourselves imaginatively in his position. Phillips believed, with the rest of the critics, that the gloomy mood which is critical of the world is apt to lead to absurdity and unhappiness, but he was one of the very few who thought that "practical, satisfied men" didn't do justice to egocentric verse. He reasserted the principle a year later in a review of Byron⁴² when he discussed subjectivity in imagery and description, and in the same article he expressed an opinion which was directly opposed to the principles of the Scottish school: "We think that poetry is most easily and accurately judged by its effects, and that this, of all arts, can least endure the fetters of a system, as its vital principles are novelty and invention . . . We therefore will not trouble ourselves to enquire to what technical species this poem belongs, or whether it belongs to any." And although he was a lover of Pope, he said that adherence to a regular measure is not necessary, and that the only requisite for harmony was a good ear.

³⁸ W. A. Bradley: *William Cullen Bryant*, New York, 1926, p. 51

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54

⁴⁰ 1821. 13. 380

⁴¹ 1816. 2. 235

⁴² 1817. 5. 98

In the criticism of the novel he was equally independent. Although it was the age of Scott, he preferred realism, and although he insisted on moral wholesomeness, he thought Miss Edgeworth made her moral lessons too obvious.⁴³ He was one of the few critics who objected to Cooper's stilted, verbose style.⁴⁴ He admired the realism of John Galt.⁴⁵ He was possibly the first to admire the qualities of DeQuincey's style.⁴⁶ In an age when prejudice against Godwin was strong, he not only called *St. Leon* and *Caleb Williams* masterpieces of their kind (though he overlooked none of their defects), but actually defended the usefulness of radical fiction and agreed that public opinion could be a cruel and unjust force.⁴⁷

*Richard Henry Dana, Sr., (1787-1879)*⁴⁸

Dana was a much more militant romantic than Phillips, and his utterances were loud as well as strong. His life was full of stridencies and contradictions, beginning with his expulsion from Harvard in 1807. Thus literary rebel was a confirmed Federalist and a trinitarian tending toward high-church Episcopalianism. As poet and novelist he was of the Gothic school, and his son records that from boyhood his father's interest was in "the Gothic mind and the Gothic poetry, architecture, legends and superstitions."⁴⁹ As a critic he followed Coleridge, Schlegel, Lamb, and Hartley Coleridge, though he imitated no one.

His work in the *North American* began in 1817 with a review of his friend Allston's *Sylphs of the Seasons*,⁵⁰ in which he praised the work of Wordsworth and Crabbe. He disliked moralism. Gardiner had said in the *Monthly Anthology*, "Neither painter nor poet should describe a quagmire." Dana replied, "Nothing is vulgar but vice." In 1818 he criticized Maria Edgeworth's *Readings in Poetry*,⁵¹ a book for children,

⁴³ 1818. 6. 153

⁴⁴ 1824. 18. 314

⁴⁵ 1830. 31. 380

⁴⁶ 1824. 18. 90

⁴⁷ 1818. 7. 92

⁴⁸ See G. M. Weimar: *Richard Henry Dana, the Elder, Critic*

⁴⁹ Weimar, p. 122

⁵⁰ 1817. 5. 365

⁵¹ 1818. 7. 69

for not making the subject attractive by choosing poems of real merit. She would make of boys "little, matter-of-fact men and unbreeched philosophers"; she ignores the imagination and the poetic sense as factors in the education of children.

In the 1819 review of Hazlitt's *Lectures on the English Poets*,⁵² which resulted in his resignation at the end of the year, he established his critical position. In the first place, he was almost alone in his appreciation of Hazlitt's prose style. Second, he urged the study of the older romantic poets, especially Spenser. Third, he denied that Pope was a poet in either subject matter, versification, or diction. Fourth, he set down concreteness of diction as a principle. Fifth, he perceived the newness of Wordsworth's moral treatment of nature: "A moral sense is given to everything, and material things become teachers of the mind and ministers of good to the heart."

His last article in the *North American* was a rather rambling review of *The Sketch Book*,⁵³ in which he admired Irving's style and wit. In the *United States Review and Literary Gazette*, which favored romanticism, he discussed the "Gothic" in the work of Mrs. Radcliffe⁵⁴ and C. B. Brown,⁵⁵ at a time when Gothicism was not popular with critics. In the *Spirit of the Pilgrims*, a Calvinistic organ founded by Lyman Beecher in 1828, he revealed his religious orthodoxy in various reviews, particularly that of Pollok's *Course of Time*, although he also took this occasion to reaffirm his doctrine of poetic diction.⁵⁶ His belligerent championship of Wordsworth and Coleridge in the preface to his *Poems and Prose Writings*, Boston, 1833, has already been noted. The preface to the first edition of his *Poems* (1827) also contains critical matter.

His lectures on Shakespeare, first delivered in 1834, and often thereafter, have been forgotten because they are un-

⁵² 1819. 8. 276

⁵⁴ 1827. 2. 1

⁵⁶ 1828. 1. 538

⁵³ 1819. 9. 322

⁵⁵ 1827. 2. 321

published, but they deserve to be remembered not only for their historical primacy, but for their excellence, as well as for the fact that they are very likely the first American treatment of Shakespeare in the manner of Schlegel and Coleridge.⁵⁷ In the introductory lecture, he stated that the purpose of poetry is "to unseal our eyes to the beauty, grandeur, and secret spiritual meanings of the outer world, and make us feel the correspondence between that outer world and our inner selves." Inasmuch as "Old English literature . . . is peculiarly a literature of thought and feeling, rules of rhetoric alone [will not] lead into a knowledge of them." Most men of affairs have difficulty in appreciating poetry. "To feel poetically, the whole being must be brought into a peculiar state; . . . and no one has such a mastery over himself as to change his entire state and the movements of his spiritual frame, in a moment and at will." Reading too much criticism is a "disturber of that wise passiveness . . . so essential to the recipient conditions." To read criticism properly one "must be of mature intellect enough to sit in judgment upon the critic judge. Some [critics] instead of trying an original work by the principle of self-congruity and the laws of our common nature, betake themselves to certain standing rules of rhetoric." The contribution of poetry to life is happiness, contentment, amusement, and deepened concepts of living. It can free men of affairs from the bondage of the material.

In Lecture II he talked of the influence of society on poetry. Poetry is best when society is homogeneous, as in the Ballad Age. Too much personal reflection is bad for it. Too much philosophizing on man and nature is dangerous to the poetic state. It has robbed even the great Wordsworth of spontaneity. Lectures III and IV are a discussion of Shakespeare's female characters, with a few side remarks against woman suffrage and equal rights. Lecture V is a treatment of the supernatural in Shakespeare. Success in this field depends on the sympathy between author and reader. It is always based

⁵⁷ Weimar says they preceded those of the Rev. Henry N. Hudson, published in Baltimore, 1846, and that Hudson's were dedicated to Dana.

on a universal principle: it proceeds from the known to the unknown. Lecture VI defends the realism of stage murders and violence. Lectures VII and VIII concern *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*.

These were fresh doctrines in American criticism. They embody not only a new attitude toward poetry but a new conception of criticism. And since they were uttered in public lectures they have importance in the study of the literary education of the American public. To a public brought up on Blair and Kames these must have been startling declarations.

Dana therefore deserves to be known as the first appreciative critic and student of Elizabethan drama, and as such he was a forerunner of Lowell, who, in the next decade, wrote enthusiastic essays on the old English dramatists; of G. C. Verplanck, who published an edition of Shakespeare between 1844 and 1846, and who claimed to be of the school of Schlegel and Coleridge;⁵⁸ and of H. H. Furness of Philadelphia.⁵⁹ Dana worked by sympathy and insight, not by rules, and he insisted on enjoyment, not analysis, as the object of the study of literature.

*W. H. Prescott, (1796-1859)*⁶⁰

Prescott was a romantic of the scholarly, conservative type, who was brought up on the traditional Scotch philosophy, and whose criticism is characterized by the most typical critical ideas of the period. His romanticism grew out of the Scotch school and his study of the Schlegels, and his criticism always has historical and social perspective. He loved the writers in the great humanistic traditions—Cervantes, Molière, and

⁵⁸ Weimar, p. 122

⁵⁹ See also William Cox. *Crayon Sketches*, New York, 1833, for an essay on "Old English Comedies"; and *A Selection from the Writings of Jonathan Lawrence*, New York, 1833, which contains an essay, written in 1827, declaring that one must go back to Old English Comedy for the satirical study of human nature which is lacking in modern literature.

⁶⁰ A number of his critical essays are reprinted in his *Biographical and Critical Miscellanies*, New York, 1845; see also his *Life* by George Ticknor, Philadelphia, 1875.

Shakespeare—and disliked the egotism of modern romanticism.

His first contribution to the *North American* was a review of Byron's "Letter on Pope" in 1821,⁶¹ in which he expressed his dislike of the "Cockney" and "Lake" schools, and his belief in the critical usefulness of the association theory. His fine analysis and history of the essay⁶² ranks with Poe's analysis of the tale in his review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*. His article on "French and English Tragedy"⁶³ shows the influence of Schlegel's and de Staël's definition of "romantic" and "classical" on the racial basis, and in it he sets forth anew his conviction that modern romanticism is unsocial, although egotism may be a source of lyric poetry. He ascribes to egotism the lack of good drama in the nineteenth century, for the drama calls for objectivity. Two articles on Italian poetry reveal his erudition, his indebtedness to the Schlegels, and his prejudice against Latin amorality.⁶⁴ In his essay "Novel Writing"⁶⁵ he applied historical principles to the development of the novel, and assigned supremacy to the English on the basis of the Nordic ability in characterization. His "Memoirs of Charles Brockden Brown" (written for Sparks's *American Biographies*, 1834) contains a careful analysis of Brown's ideas, his characterization, and, particularly, the probability of his plots. His essay on "English Literature of the 19th Century"⁶⁶ is a successful attempt to get a perspective on the literature of the time, except for his omission of Keats and Shelley and his obvious dislike of romantic poetry. Three articles reveal his knowledge of Spanish history and literature. A large section of his review of Irving's *Conquest of Granada*⁶⁷ is devoted to Spanish history. The article also contains interesting though prejudiced remarks on the historical style of Voltaire and Gibbon, and a protest against the old type of historical writing which told the reader how he should

⁶¹ 1821. 13. 450

⁶² 1823. 16. 124

⁶³ 1827. 25. 183

⁶⁴ 1829. 29. 305

⁶² 1822. 14. 319

⁶⁴ 1824. 19. 337; 1831. 33. 29

⁶⁶ 1832. 35. 165

feel rather than made him feel by giving him the facts fairly and vividly. The review of Francis Sales' Spanish edition of Cervantes⁶⁸ summarizes English and American contributions to the study of Spanish literature, and reveals his love of the literature of "man as he exists in society." His remarks on *Don Quixote* show a rare grasp of the purposes and the implications of the novel. The article on Ticknor's *History*, which he wrote late in his career,⁶⁹ is a Schlegelian study of the whole subject.

His article on Molière⁷⁰ was a labor of love as well as of scholarship. This, and his review of Chateaubriand's *English Literature* in 1839,⁷¹ reveal both his debt to and his disagreements with Schlegel. The German critics developed a valuable historical technique, which Prescott profited by, but, in his opinion, their enthusiasm led them beyond common sense. He was willing to let their method help him to understand past literature, but he was not willing to let it betray him into an admiration of literary defects or of such literature as that of the Italians or of the modern romantics which conflicted with so many of his deep-seated Puritan and Scotch prejudices. This is just another example of how American critics were "influenced" by foreign sources the while they retained their national characteristics.

Prescott's contribution to the criticism of style has been discussed in the chapter on that subject.

Alexander Hill Everett,⁷² (1791-1847)

In a busy life devoted principally to ambassadorial work, Everett found time not only to edit the *North American* but to write many philosophical and scholarly articles. A Federalist by inheritance, he nevertheless kept his independence, and, to the annoyance of his party, ran for office on the Democratic ticket in 1813, and aroused criticism by his lenient attitude

⁶⁸ 1837 45 1

⁶⁹ 1852 70 1

⁷⁰ 1828 27 372

⁷¹ 1839. 49. 317

⁷² Some of Everett's articles and verse are collected in his *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, Boston, 1845.

toward the French Revolutionists in a Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard ⁷³

As a critic, he was chiefly interested in French and German literature and in philosophy. Like Prescott he was intellectually a product of the Scotch school of philosophy and of the classical tradition in literature. Naturally he was hostile to Byron and to everything in romanticism that Byron represented, and in his philosophical criticism he tried to arrive at the philosophical cause and cure of what he believed was a dangerous trend in modern literature. The most typical of his reviews are those on Byron⁷⁴ in which he calls him the greatest poet since Pope and socially the most dangerous one; on Geoffroy's *History of French Dramatic Literature*,⁷⁵ on Schiller,⁷⁶ wherein he repudiates the German conception of romanticism and criticizes the morality of Schiller's "noble robbers"; on Madame de Staël;⁷⁷ and on Rousseau.⁷⁸

Everett's connection with German literature is noteworthy. An ardent student of the language, he was the author of one of the three most important articles on German literature before 1816⁷⁹—a review of "Musaeus' Popular Tales" in the *General Repository and Review*.⁸⁰ It contains a defense of the simplicity of folk narrative style and folk literature which is interesting because it is based on the neo-classical principle of the soundness of the "general taste." It also contains some of Everett's own translations, and concludes with a plea for the cultivation of the German language in America because of its relation to English. His volume of *Essays* contains a number of translations from Goethe, Burger, and Schiller.

His connection with German philosophy is particularly significant. It is generally supposed that the few Americans who understood Kantian philosophy in the thirties were

⁷³ *U. S. Democratic Review*, 1842. 10. 460

⁷⁴ 1825. 20. 1

⁷⁵ 1820. 10. 291

⁷⁶ 1823. 16. 397

⁷⁷ 1822. 14. 101

⁷⁸ 1822. 15. 1

⁷⁹ Goodnight, *German Literature in American Magazines Prior to 1846*, p. 38

⁸⁰ 1813. 4. 91

transcendentalists. It is apparent, however, that Everett had a grasp of that philosophy without subscribing in the least to transcendental principles. It is probable that he studied it in Holland during his residence there as secretary to the American legation, 1815-1817 and 1818-1824.⁸¹ At any rate, as early as 1822 he was in a position to criticize Madame de Staël for not studying Kant adequately,⁸² and other articles and addresses throughout the decade⁸³ reveal him as an intellectual product of Scotch philosophy who was nevertheless capable of evaluating the newer abstruse continental philosophies in which some of our ardent American Kantians were obviously out of their depth.

Moreover he subjected the Common Sense philosophy to tests which expose the limitations and the weaknesses of that system. In this there is a seeming paradox. He subscribed to every tenet which I have shown to be characteristic of the criticism of the period. His article on Geoffroy reveals a conviction of the social and moral duty of the artist; the one on Byron his idea of the need for basic moral soundness in the poet; the one on de Staël, his dislike of mysticism. His "Dialogue on Government" between Franklin and Montesquieu⁸⁴ reveals his earnest Whigism, particularly in the remark that "political power is inseparable from property." In an address at Amherst in 1833,⁸⁵ he denied the validity of the theories of perfectibility of the French Revolutionists, of the Owenites, and of Herder, and yet said that Malthus was wrong in his denial of the possibility of any improvement. His answer was that human nature is always the same; that civilization is better at some times than at others; and that "inherent evil

⁸¹ *U. S. Democratic Review*, 1842. 10. 460

⁸² *North American Review*, 1822. 14. 101

⁸³ "De Gerando's History of Philosophy," *North American Review*, 1824; "History of Intellectual Philosophy," *Ibid.*, 1829. 29. 67; "Stewart's Moral Philosophy," *Ibid.*, 1830. 31. 213; "Sir James Mackintosh," *Ibid.*, 1832; *Address to the Philhellenic Society of Brown University*, Providence, 1837, *Address on Character and Influence of German Literature*, (Dartmouth), Boston, 1839

⁸⁴ In *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, Boston, 1845

⁸⁵ *Discourse on the Progress and Limits of Social Improvement*, August 27, 1833, Boston, 1834.

is warmed into life and activity by the same general causes that develop the principles of good." In an address at Brown University in 1837,⁸⁶ he attacked Rousseau as the root of all evil in German, French, and English literature, and Hume as the source of skepticism. Yet he found Reid and Stewart too dry, and spoke admiringly of Kant.

He found the Scots satisfactory in every way except the purely intellectual; yet with all his admiration of Kant's philosophic perfection, he could not accept his ideality. His final solution, after he had examined the work of the latest Scot, Thomas Brown, and of Cousin, was that they were both potential atheists, and that only Kant's idealism was safe.⁸⁷ But though Kant built his system in order to escape the skepticism of Hume, his ideas would not stand the test of everyday life. Idealism in the Scotch philosophy was cold and half-hearted; in Kant it was complete and essential. The result was that he assigned Kantianism to the realm of poetry and put his trust in Locke, whose ideas had at least the virtue of practicability for an active man of the world.

His pragmatic solution is a suggestive one to the student who has been confused by the contradictions which seem to exist in American life and literature. The Franklins and the Edwardses, the Holmeses and the Emersons are many. But one suspects that the majority of cultured Americans have been neither one nor the other, but rather have been Everetts—content to live by the authority of experience, but finding philosophy, as a subject for contemplation, "divine."

Edward Tyrrell Channing, (1790-1856)

Reference has already been made (p. 32) to the immense importance of Channing's teaching of rhetoric at Harvard. Less celebrated than his brother, William Ellery, he nevertheless exerted a powerful influence upon Harvard men from

⁸⁶ *Address to the Philermenian Society of Brown University, on the Moral Character of the Literature of the Last and the Present Century*, September 4, 1837, Providence, 1837.

⁸⁷ 1829 29 67

1819 to 1851, and was perhaps the most important individual of his time in the dissemination of Scotch æsthetic. Moreover, as editor and critic for the *North American* in 1817-1819 he put his theories into practice and wrote able and sometimes admirable reviews. A Federalist and a unitarian, he was necessarily conservative, but his conservatism was intelligent and occasionally it had a liberal slant.

His *Lectures Read to the Seniors in Harvard College* (1856) deals primarily with rhetoric according to the modern definition, which he himself probably helped to establish in his statement (p. 41) that rhetoric treats of style in the wide sense but has nothing to do with the department of belles lettres. Certain chapters, however, are pertinent here. That on "Literary Tribunals," for example, reflects the Scotch influence in its contention that a classic becomes popular because the author is a lover of his race (p. 154). He admits, however, that some of the "dark and difficult" works make no compromise with the reader, do not try to communicate clearly, and are important for their influence on writers. Under the circumstances, this was a liberal concession, but in the same chapter he expresses the patrician attitude toward the function of criticism: The highest criticism is left to a very few hands, by whom the many are willing to be guided, and the critic is strengthened by the generality.

There is, then, some confidence in the ultimate grounds of human judgment. Taste, however defined, and however corrupted, capricious and narrow it may be, in some men and at certain periods, is yet an original faculty or operation of the mind, and has its laws and principles as fixed as those of any power, and requires, like any power, a thorough cultivation for a full development. . . . And the criticism that passes upon [the accepted classics] owes all that can properly be called its authority to its detection and illustration of this conformity [to the principles of taste which seem to endure]. (p. 164)

Obviously he was a product of the eighteenth century, and his criticisms in the *North American* reveal his training in the Scotch school. His review of Dunlap's life of Brockden

Brown,⁸⁸ for instance, is marred by the misappliance of the associational theory to the problem of the treatment of social classes in the American novel. Moreover, in some of his articles the moral point of view is too obtrusive. But most of his work shows a sane appreciative sense and a grasp of fundamental principles. In "On Models in Literature,"⁸⁹ for example, his plea for greater imagination in the judgment of literature, more nativeness, and less imitation, is distinctly progressive, and the quotation from Wordsworth at the head of the essay shows him to be, in 1816, an early friend of that poet. Likewise, in a review of Montgomery's poems⁹⁰ he seems to have been abreast of the times in his admission, after a conventional catalogue of the qualities of the poetic mind, that there is a higher principle of genius: "Sometimes the mind, thus gifted, is said to have a distinct being, another nature and even world, from ours."

The best of his essays is the review of Scott's *Rob Roy*,⁹¹ which is notable for its keen analysis of Scott's strength and weakness. Little having been done toward a critique of the romantic novel by 1818, this review is a minor landmark in its field. Scott, he says, carries his historical knowledge lightly. But his greatest genius is in getting the reader interested in character rather than in details, so that the mind is warmed by the subject and the reader performs part of the literary function by throwing a glow over the materials. Moreover, Scott's work exhibits truth to life itself and an underlying philosophy which shapes and deepens the narrative. Finally, Channing is definitely progressive in his perception that Scott is weakest when he steps outside the framework of his narrative and talks to or trifles with the reader.

It is regrettable that this critic devoted so little of his time to criticism, for his printed work offers only a hint of powers which might have put him in the front rank of his contemporaries.

⁸⁸ 1819. 9. 58

⁹⁰ 1819. 9. 276

⁸⁹ 1816. 3. 202

⁹¹ 1818. 7. 149

*George Bancroft, (1800-1891)*⁹²

Bancroft presents the interesting spectacle of the typical gentleman-scholar-critic of the period turned Democrat. In him the new American political idealism became a passion which dominated all his historical utterances. Unpopular in his own class, partly because of his personality, partly because of his enthusiasm for Jacksonian democracy, he reaped material benefits from his political connections which were not enjoyed by his colleagues whose dislike of the rabble kept their belief in republican government on a theoretical plane Democrats being rare in Massachusetts, distinguished ones got preferment, and Bancroft, as Collector of the Port of Boston, was in a position to give jobs to Hawthorne and Brownson.

Potentially a radical, Bancroft was nevertheless constitutionally a very normal member of the professional group that dominated culture. As a youth he was subjected to a series of liberal influences and enthusiasms whose effect wore off when he reached maturity. As one of the early Harvardians who studied in Germany, he met Goethe and listened to his reverent talk about Kant; dined with A. W. Schlegel; and became excited over the Pestalozzian theories of education with which the Germans were experimenting. But he gave up his own experiments in teaching at Round Hill very quickly, and before he was forty he attacked Goethe for his moral tone and Schlegel for his literary radicalism. A volume of Byronic poetry in 1823 (after a meeting with Byron in 1822) was followed in the next ten years by frequent aspersions upon Byron's character. His liberalism was safe and discreet, and his early radicalism quickly sank beneath the political and economic complacency which was characteristic of the public at large in the romantic period.⁹³

⁹² See M. A. De Wolfe Howe *Life and Letters of George Bancroft*, N. Y., 1908, see also a recent study in Orrie William Long: *Literary Pioneers: Early American Explorers of European Culture*, Cambridge, 1935.

⁹³ O. W. Long has tried to show (in "Goethe and Bancroft," *Univ. of North Carolina Studies in Philology*, 1931. 28. 288) that Bancroft's views were inconsistent and that in the period 1824-1839 he developed moral objections to

His interest to us as a critic lies in his articles on German literature, which appeared in the *North American*, the *American Quarterly Review*, and the *Christian Examiner*. Read chronologically as they appear in his *Literary and Historical Miscellanies* (1855) they present a history of German culture to the age of Goethe. Three facts emerge from a study of these articles: (1) That Bancroft was attracted to German culture because of its strong nationalism and the struggles for political freedom which lie behind it; (2) that his literary judgments are basically moralistic; (3) that his thought represents a fusion of Scottish conservatism and American idealism. In the introductory essay his discussion of the dignity of the career of letters and scholarship in Germany, and of the relationship between the national spirit and geographical and economic factors, reveals his faith in cultural leadership by the middle class. This is followed by a treatment of the "Revival of German Literature" under Klopstock, Lessing, Wieland, and Winckelmann which suggests his kinship with Longfellow and other Americans of the romantic period who cared little for German transcendental thought but admired the minor moralists and sentimentalists. The same tendency appears in the essay on the "Age of Goethe and Schiller," where Herder is set up as a model of moral beauty, and the Schlegels and Tieck are criticized because their efforts to emancipate literature from rules resulted in "a feeble and affected imitation of natural excellence." Unlike most of his contemporaries, Bancroft considered Schiller morally wholesome and a greater poet than Goethe, whose depiction of human suffering he thought reprehensible and who was too indifferent to moral effect. The cause of his prejudice against Goethe comes to light in his statement that Goethe thought man could never be politically free. As a critic, therefore, Bancroft is open to the charge of political bias which has been laid against him as historian ⁹⁴

Goethe There was no real inconsistency In 1824 Bancroft was twenty-four years old, in 1839 he was thirty-nine

⁹⁴ N. H. Dawes and F. T. Nichols "Revaluing Bancroft," *New England Quarterly*, 1933, 6. 278

This bias, his moralism, and his love of classical scholarship mark him as a transitional figure between the period of Federalist culture and that of the rise of the Genteel Tradition.

Samuel Gilman, (1791-1858)

A typical Harvard Unitarian, Samuel Gilman is the perfect representative of the clergyman-critic group. Indeed his articles on the Scottish philosophy, read with his reviews of contemporary verse, are the best illustrations possible of the impact of Scottish thought, modified by American ideals, upon literature. It is perfectly fitting, therefore, that his estimate of the relationship between artist and society should serve as the keynote of the criticism of his period. (See p. 25)

But Gilman was no mere moral watchdog. An enthusiastic student of literature, he knew the German language, translated Florian, was familiar with early English literature, and became, after his removal to Charleston in 1819, one of the leading literary figures in South Carolina.⁹⁵ Throughout his years of ministry in the South he contributed to the *North American*, the *Christian Examiner*, and the *Southern Quarterly Review*,⁹⁶ and edited volumes of writings for such local literary lights as William Crafts and Mary Elizabeth Lee.

That he was capable of lightness and wit is evident in his review of Eustaphie's *Demetrius*,⁹⁷ but it is as a champion of the Scottish philosophers that he is most significant. In 1830 he denied that Blair and Alison were outmoded,⁹⁸ and credited Blair with having "brought religion into the parlour." Three articles on Thomas Brown reveal that he was progressive within the lines of his prejudices, for Brown was at least more daring than his masters, Reid and Stewart. The first of these articles⁹⁹ served to help popularize Brown, who had been neglected because he seemed to border upon

⁹⁵ See W. S. Hoole "The Gilmans and the Southern Rose," *North Carolina Historical Review*, 1934, 11. 116

⁹⁶ Collected in *Contributions to Literature*, Boston, 1856

⁹⁷ *North American Review*, 1818, 7 258

⁹⁸ *Christian Examiner*, 1830, 9. 304

⁹⁹ *North American Review*, 1821 12 395

Hume's skepticism. Gilman denied this, and continued his defense in 1824,¹⁰⁰ when he analyzed the deficiencies of both the realists and the deists. Here he drew a distinction between metaphysics, which speculates upon the nature of that which is hidden and unknown, and philosophy, which ascertains causes and learns from experience the properties of things. Hume and the deists were too metaphysical; Reid and Stewart were not speculative enough. Brown corrects their faults by his boldness and originality. But the Scottish philosophy generally has contributed to human happiness. "Who can doubt that individual virtue has been strengthened, and individual happiness increased by a scientific acquaintance with the principle of association," for when one is depressed it teaches him how to lead his thoughts to brightness.¹⁰¹

In this there was some advance toward the spirit of the '40's, for like the transcendentalists he thought of philosophy as instrumental to moral and spiritual ends, and emphasized its relation to optimism. The most powerful drive behind all Gilman's work, however, is the desire to mold all philosophic and literary thought to social ends, and it is this urge which explains his attack upon the romantic poets and the romantic mind generally in his significant review of *Percival* in 1823.¹⁰² It is perhaps the earliest trenchant analysis of the social implications of romantic philosophy and æsthetic, and is a worthy anticipation of Lowell's treatment of the same subject in his important essays on Rousseau and Thoreau.

William Howard Gardiner, (1797-1882)

Gardiner, who is remembered chiefly for his intimate friendship with Prescott, deserves a note for his criticisms of the novel, which have been discussed separately in Chapter VII. Three of them are as good as anything produced in the period, and are not less enjoyable because of their asperity.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1824 19 1 The third appeared in 1825 21 19

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5

¹⁰² 1823 16 102

¹⁰³ Cooper's *The Spy*, 1822. 15 250, *The Wilderness*, 1824. 19 209, Cooper's *The Pioneers*, 1826. 23. 150

In all of them he exhibits an impatience with the clichés and fallacies which had developed in fictional discussion in the few years before he began to review. He attacked the obtuse but common notion that America could produce no good novels because its social classes were not well defined; the idea that "low" characters were not suitable for fiction; the circumstance that freaks labeled "American" in novels should be allowed to pass as such. He deplored the technique of the contemporary novel, especially its lack of unity, its excessive detail, and its superfluous characters. He analyzed unerringly the faults and virtues of Cooper in a day when his popularity was evoking indiscriminate praise.

Gardiner's good sense is displayed in one other work—an "Address on Classical Learning and Eloquence," delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard in 1834. (Gardiner was a member of the class of 1816.) It is largely a protest against the growing impatience of discipline in the romantic mind in America. "All authority is questionable . . . All restraint is intolerable." Criticism has no principles, art no rules. He quotes Hume to the effect that "a republic is most favorable to the growth of the sciences, and a civilized monarchy to that of the polite arts." The reason is that in a republic talent looks downward to the people for its reward and therefore seeks to become useful; whereas in a monarchy it looks upward, through successive gradations of arbitrary ranks, to the throne as the ultimate fountain of honor, and therefore aims at the agreeable.

United States Literary Gazette (1824-1827)

This magazine is a semi-monthly of sixteen pages quarto, the reviews of which are so short that it hardly comes within the scope of this study. Yet it was so alive to current and significant literature that it deserves notice. Moreover, its history and its contributors give it distinction, for it grew into a monthly after it merged with Bryant's *New York Review*, and the poetry it published by Bryant, Longfellow, Percival, and Dana was good enough to be brought out in book form (Boston, 1825).

Its tone is modern and romantic throughout. It specialized in reviews of the best current novels, liked mediævalism in romantic poetry, preferred Wordsworth to Byron, and welcomed De Quincey. Its best review is one of Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*¹⁰⁴ which judges the novel's virtues and faults from much the same point of view as that of the modern critic

The Christian Spectator, New Haven (1819-1838)

This magazine is interesting in so far as it represents the literary attitude of orthodox Presbyterianism. It was conducted by "an association of gentlemen" who felt that since "After a struggle of twenty years the battle against infidelity has been won," they could settle down in safety and consider their intellectual status. Accordingly, it reveals the changes which had been wrought in the minds of the orthodox since the days of the Hartford Wits, and the way in which orthodoxy adjusted itself to new literary and philosophical movements.

Philosophically, it allied itself with Scotch Realism as a defender of the faith, and rejoiced to see that the philosophy of Thomas Brown harmonized with the Revelations¹⁰⁵. The reviewer of Brown was aware that that philosopher had been charged with skepticism, but did not find the charge justifiable. Similarly, when it reviewed Stewart,¹⁰⁶ it agreed with his disposition of the problem of good and evil, saying that the Deity is benevolent, but that such evil as exists "unavoidably attends the government of the world by general laws," and that it is part of God's plan. When one considers that the *Spectator* was the leading organ of orthodoxy in the East, and that Presbyterian missionaries in the West accepted its authority, one can understand Professor Riley's description of Scotch philosophy moving out over the country like a glacier.

The *Spectator* at first approached literature rather circum-

¹⁰⁴ 1826. 4. 87

¹⁰⁵ 1821 3 583

¹⁰⁶ 1821. 3. 244

spectly and was inclined to review only that poetry which was written by ministers, or by local celebrities. Thus it reviewed Pierpont's *Airs of Palestine*¹⁰⁷ after he had joined the clergy, but with apologies for reviewing poetry at all. But poetry may be "a powerful aid to religion," as well as a force for evil.

We do not consider melody and harmony of versification, richness of poetic diction, or even brilliancy and beauty of imagery as among the most important parts of good poetry. They are in themselves unworthy the attention of an immortal being in this transitory, probationary state, unless they are made the means of recommending and enforcing virtuous sentiments, of awakening holy affections, and thus of elevating the character, purifying the heart, and promoting the happiness of man.

This unliterary depreciation of the technique of art did not prevent the *Spectator* from enjoying the work of some of the romantics whom many of the secular magazines rejected; and before the decade was out it admitted that "one kind of poetry is interesting for its execution." The circumstance that this admission was made in a review of Dana,¹⁰⁸ who was a trinitarian, suggests that the orthodox were led to take art more seriously when they perceived that it was being produced by the faithful. Indeed, the *Spectator* soon found itself arguing that Protestant Christianity alone could produce great poetry,¹⁰⁹ and by 1836 it had to admit that it had done Wordsworth an injustice by neglecting him.¹¹⁰ At about the same time it awakened to the importance of German literature and philosophy¹¹¹ and of Cousin.¹¹² This fact affirms what the career of James Marsh of Andover has already suggested—that before transcendentalism took hold in America, liberal and orthodox clergy alike were enjoying the support of the foreign philosophers whom we tend to think of as having ministered exclusively to the radical idealists. Schlegel, too, was known to the critics of the *Spectator*.

¹⁰⁷ 1821. 3. 634

¹⁰⁸ 1834. 6. 196

¹¹¹ 1835. 7. 13

¹⁰⁶ 1829. 1. 674

¹¹⁰ 1836. 8. 127

¹¹² 1835. 7. 89

This magazine demonstrates interestingly the alliance between religious and political orthodoxy. A critic of Percival¹¹³ reproved him for being at variance with "the commonly received opinions of society," for such an attitude is hostile to the spirit of the Gospel. The old Federalist fear of mobs appears in the remark that "in a country like our own, where a free press, and the most valuable institutions on earth exist, and where the preservation of both depends on the moral principles and habits of the people, to urge the claims of virtue and religion is the part of patriotism." The *Spectator's* defense of the factory system has already been noted.¹¹⁴

Two other organs of orthodoxy are of less literary interest—the *Spirit of the Pilgrims*, Boston, 1828-1833, and the *American Quarterly Observer*, Boston, 1833-1834, to both of which Dana contributed. The latter shows the influence of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and contains an interesting article by Samuel Worcester on "The Qualifications of a Critic"¹¹⁵ in which there is a discussion of the "science" of criticism (i.e., association), of Blair, and of Schlegel.

The American Monthly Magazine, Boston (1829-1831)

This magazine was representative of no one but Willis, but it was one of the most readable magazines of the period. It was modeled on Campbell's *New Monthly Magazine*, and ran a literary-chat column much like Wilson's "Noctes Ambrosianae" in *Blackwood's*. Most of the criticism was by Willis,¹¹⁶ though Motley, Albert Pike, and Park Benjamin also contributed. Willis' best criticism is in the form of essays and book-chat rather than reviews. In "Criticism Systematized"¹¹⁷ he declared himself averse to the *Edinburgh* method of using the review as an occasion for an "essay on something else," and said that the critic's duty was to tell the contents of the volume.

¹¹³ 1822 4. 643

¹¹⁴ 1832 4 375

¹¹⁵ 1833 1 287

¹¹⁶ H. A. Beers *Nathaniel Parker Willis*, Boston, 1885, p 82

¹¹⁷ 1829 1. 323

Occasionally the familiar American critical doctrines appear, as in the article on *Wilhelm Meister*,¹¹⁸ where German skepticism and gloom are deprecated. But on the whole, the criticisms are devoted to enjoyment rather than analysis and judgment. In the "Editor's Table" there are brief but delightful discussions of Chatterton, Shelley, Keats, and Lamb, whose names were seldom mentioned in other magazines. In the same department Willis discussed informally the contemporary American poets. Albert Pike, probably the earliest American disciple of Keats, contributed, among other things, a poem on the "Progress of Poetry" which begins with Shakespeare and ends with Coleridge.¹¹⁹

These two young men hardly belong in this survey, since their work was just beginning in 1830, but their work is an interesting contrast to the typical criticism of the period. It lacked authority, but it undoubtedly whetted its readers' appetite for some of the new poetry.

New England Magazine, (1831-1835)

Mott calls this the most important general magazine published in New England before the *Atlantic Monthly*, and certainly its list of contributors contains the names of most of the rising literary figures of the day. But as its contributors were young men whose best work was still ahead of them, they do not belong to the first third of the century.

As for criticism, the reviews were too short to be of much importance, but the magazine was distinguished by a series of "Literary Portraits," which were the best thing of their kind in the period, and are equal to Poe's best work in the same line. These were the work of George Stillman Hillard (1808-1879), most of whose criticism falls outside of our period. His other literary work consists of a series of orations,¹²⁰ an edition of Spenser in five volumes (1839), a *Selection from the Writings of Landor* (1856), a memoir of Henry R. Cleveland

¹¹⁸ 1829. 1. 149

¹¹⁹ 1830. 2. 644

¹²⁰ Listed in Charles S. Cleveland's *Compendium of American Literature*, Philadelphia, 1858, p. 594.

(1844), and contributions to the *North American Review* and the *Christian Examiner*.

The best of the Literary Portraits are those of Halleck,¹²¹ Bryant,¹²² and Percival.¹²³ Halleck he judges as a sketcher of the externals of nature—he does not perceive “the mysterious union between the mind of man and the mute forms of the external world.” He is preoccupied with the manners of men, not their natures; he perceives expressions of character without understanding character itself. His forte is the union of the humorous and the pathetic, a mode which is to be found far back in Italian literature. He has grace and delicacy. Bryant, on the other hand, is a true nature poet who sees the connection between the worlds within and without. His versification is superb, though he regards language as an instrument for transmitting thought, and employs it for nothing more. He is remarkable for his avoidance of the theme of love in an age when men “versify their flirtations.” As for Percival, nature made him a poet and gave him the power to see visions and dream dreams. Yet he is not a good poet, for he writes too easily—he is discursive, diffuse, and slovenly as a versifier. His *Prometheus* is the raw material for poetry. He lacks wit, humor, and the faculty for close observation.

All these portraits are written in vigorous, racy English. Hillard's chief distinction as a critic is power of analysis. Therein he differs from Willis, who criticized emotionally, and from the conventional critic of the period, who applied a set of principles.

The American Monthly Review, (1832-1833)

This review, which merged with the *New England Magazine*, was edited by Professor Sidney Willard,¹²⁴ who resigned the chair of Hebrew at Harvard to do the work. It was a Harvard periodical, scholarly, thoughtful, and thorough,

¹²¹ 1831. 1. 153

¹²² 1831. 1. 398

¹²³ 1832. 2. 408

¹²⁴ His *Memories*, Boston, 1855, contains much interesting comment on college life, and literature.

made up principally of short reviews of scholarly works, but containing an occasional brilliant discussion of general literature. It excelled in analytic criticism of a heavier type than Hillard's, though its long articles on pure literature were all too few. The best of these is a review of Bryant¹²⁵ which contains perhaps the period's only good analysis of the function of the lyric, and a most illuminating discussion of the limits to which poetry should go in the realms of the incommunicable. As a statement of the grounds upon which "common sense" criticism and mystical poetry can meet, it is the most important critical document of the period. It is also a penetrating and appreciative criticism of Bryant. Two other articles of interest are a repudiation of Longinus,¹²⁶ and an important appreciation of Schlegel's *Lectures*.¹²⁷

The Christian Examiner, (1824-1869)

The *Examiner* was the most important magazine of the years 1830-1835. Up to 1829 it was predominantly theological in appeal; thereafter it took to the criticism of literature with a vigor and freshness of point of view which are the more astounding in view of its steady adherence to the moral and spiritual principles which seemed to inhibit the literary powers of most journals. Nor did it shrink even from novels, but drew them into the pure, white light of its standards and found them candidates for grace alike with poetry and philosophy. Here was unitarianism at its intellectual best. Here, too, were the critical standards of the day warmed into life and vitality. The critical success of the *Examiner* was, in fact, due to its ability to make the moral test a living principle rather than a restrictive one. It did not fear "art," because it believed that beauty was an aspect of goodness. It was not inhibited by political and economic prejudices because it believed that men are good and that the common man is to be trusted.

The chief characteristic of its criticism is moral earnest-

¹²⁵ 1832. 1. 296

¹²⁶ 1833. 3. 20

¹²⁷ 1833. 4. 1

ness, though it thought art not only compatible with but necessary to moral effectiveness. Thus, in a review of Bulwer-Lytton's *Pelham*,¹²⁸ it rebelled against the usual demand for a just distribution of rewards and punishments to the various characters, and insisted that the novelist "secure the reader's regard for the characters in proportion to their merit." At the same time, it set forth the vitalizing doctrine that "novels belong to the department of poetry." It deprecated the public's taste for tales of horror and crime, not because such works were harmful but because they were merely entertaining.¹²⁹ It approved the study of old English literature.¹³⁰ It could say a good word for Godwin's ideas on education in spite of its disapproval of his skepticism.¹³¹ It reviewed Goethe enthusiastically as poet, novelist, and critic.¹³² It admired Dana's treatment of the horrible without approving of the new trend toward Gothicism, for such works "do not represent man as he is, scarcely as he can be."¹³³ Indeed the *Examiner* was a champion of realism in fiction simply because of its faith that the real is beautiful.

As a force against the moral coldness implicit in the Common Sense philosophy, the *Examiner* was important. It felt that moral soundness in philosophy was not enough. Philosophy must inspire, must open up the depths of the moral universe. "We want [the holy and spiritual relations] to be held up in living colors, as everlasting realities, in which every human being has a deep and vital interest."¹³⁴ To that end, it looked with interest to the philosophy of Coleridge, Kant, and Cousin. It found poetry in their philosophy, for their philosophy found poetry in everything. Like other Wordsworth enthusiasts, it embraced the principle, so antipathetic to the spirit of Scotch criticism, that the elements of poetry are everywhere.

The two most important reviews it printed during the

¹²⁸ 1829. 6. 173

¹²⁹ 1831. 11. 1

¹³⁰ 1830. 8. 187

¹³¹ 1830. 7. 74

¹²⁹ 1830. 8. 46

¹³¹ 1831. 11. 263

¹³² 1834. 15. 392

period were by Hedge and Channing. Frederick Henry Hedge (1805-1890) belongs to the next period, though his early work in the *Examiner* was representative of the time. He had studied in Germany as a youth, attended Harvard Divinity School, was editor of the *Examiner* from 1857 to 1861, and taught German literature at Harvard, 1872-1884. He was one of the few early transcendentalists who knew German philosophy at first hand. As a critic he is important chiefly for his reviews in the *Examiner* and for his *Prose Writers of Germany*, 1848. The most important article he produced before 1835 was a review of Coleridge's works,¹³⁵ in which he gauged that writer accurately as an artist, and offered the first intelligent discussion of Kantianism in the period. The most interesting critical passage in it is a discussion of Coleridge's moralizing powers, wherein we may observe how radically the old doctrine of association could be interpreted.¹³⁶

*William Ellery Channing, (1780-1842)*¹³⁷

Channing was one of the most distinguished critics of the period, though his work seldom descended to the details and methods of any particular author or volume. He was interested in the general relationship between literature, philosophy, religion, and humanity, and thus was the natural predecessor of Emerson. His criticism, therefore, was not analytical but a combination of the appreciative and the judicial. He applied the tests of moral idealism and of universality, and these marked the limits of his appreciation.

His criticism is to be found in the *Examiner*, in his orations, and in the biographical sources. His first important article was his "Remarks on the Character and Writings of John Milton,"¹³⁸ which is an estimate of poetry on the basis of new philosophical and religious concepts. It avows the essential ideality of poetry. But that Channing was a product

¹³⁵ 1833. 14. 108

¹³⁶ p. 113.

¹³⁷ See his *Works*, Boston, 1877, which contains his reviews and addresses; also his *Notebook*, 1887, and Elizabeth P. Peabody's *Reminiscences of William Ellery Channing*, Boston, 1880.

¹³⁸ 1826. 3. 29

of the period may be seen in his statement that Milton's work was not gloomy, and that it did not contain that "whining sensibility and exaggeration of morbid feeling, which makes so much of modern poetry effeminating."

The "Remarks on National Literature"¹⁸⁹ is interesting as an anticipation of Emerson's "American Scholar," and as a broad and idealistic conception of the social function of literature. To Channing, literature was a social and moral force, produced by superior minds. An American literature should deal primarily with man, for in America no artificial distinctions have obscured the common nature of man. The chief hope of an improved literature rests on the development of an improved religion.

Two other important works are orations. The first is "Self-Culture," 1838, one of his efforts toward popular education, the central point of which is the Wordsworthian doctrine that beauty is relationship between nature and the soul. It is interesting to note that this remark is preceded by the Scotch conception of the sense of beauty as an innate sense. The second is "The Present Age," 1841, which contains tributes to Wordsworth and Dickens, both of whom, he says, deal with the common forms of life and with the common people.

Miss Peabody's *Reminiscences* throws light on his intellectual debts, and reveals the remarkable breadth and liberality of his literary views. He talked enthusiastically about Mary Wollstonecraft, Rousseau, Godwin, Shelley, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. He studied Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*, and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. He liked German literature, but preferred Schiller to Goethe. His greatest intellectual debt was to Hutcheson, whose theory of "disinterested benevolence" saved him from Locke and started him on the road to idealism.

4. NEW YORK

In spite of its literary atmosphere, New York did not do distinguished work in criticism. Its best critic, Bryant, was an importation from New England, Irving and Paulding wrote

little important criticism, and the *Knickerbocker Magazine* group belongs in the next period. Generally, New York periodicals were devoted to essays, poetry, and miscellanies, and contained little criticism of any length or of any distinctive principle. One of the most interesting magazines it produced was Brown's *Monthly Magazine and American Review*, 1799-1800, which became the quarterly *American Review and Literary Journal*, 1801-1802, but these were the work of a Philadelphian and belong to the preceding period.

H. Biglow's *American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review* (1817-1819) is pretentious but unimportant. It reflects most of the literary prejudices of the period, without the authority and conviction which characterize its Philadelphia contemporaries. Its reviews consist principally of excerpt, and it is generally dull and uncritical.

The *Literary and Scientific Repository*, 1820-1822, was a quarterly which took most of its material from British magazines, and said little of interest except in an article on early Elizabethan plays¹⁴⁰ and one on Schiller.¹⁴¹

The *Atlantic Magazine*, 1824-1825, which became the *New York Review and Atheneum Magazine*, 1825-1826, was easily the best New York critical journal of the period. Its editor, Robert C. Sands, appeared to be a critical disciple of Alison and Thomas Campbell, and introduced some of the latter's liberal ideas into an article on Byron.¹⁴² The influence of both of them appears in the most distinctive critical feature of the magazine, a long review of Wordsworth in 1824.¹⁴³ After admitting his confusion on the question whether criticism should work by judgment or feeling, and objecting to the "raving" school of criticism in *Blackwood's*, the reviewer turned for guidance to Alison and his principle of association. He agreed with him that taste is individual and that the only possible critical method is to be found in the study of "the most prevalent and permanent associations." On that basis, he found Wordsworth satisfactory, except for his the-

¹⁴⁰ 1821. 3. 42

¹⁴² 1824. 2. 98

¹⁴¹ 1821. 3. 411

¹⁴³ 1825. 2. 334, 419

ories, and admired his treatment of nature and of universal truths. It is a thorough and reasonable review by a critic who took his duties conscientiously

The *New York Review* under the editorship of Bryant was both lively and thoughtful. It reflected the modified romanticism that characterized Bryant's criticism, and in particular championed the new versification and diction which Phillips and Dana had supported earlier in the *North American*. The most important articles it published were Bryant's review of Hillhouse (see below), a perspicacious examination of *Lionel Lincoln*,¹⁴⁴ and a unique analysis of the tale as a literary form.¹⁴⁵

*William Cullen Bryant, (1794-1878)*¹⁴⁶

Bryant was a product of both the old and new schools of criticism, and while none of his criticism, with the exception of his Lectures, was first rate, he is a good example of the literary man who is rooted in tradition, yet builds, upon the principles of the past, ideas which lead to new things. Certainly he was not a critical free thinker like his friends Dana and Phillips. For example, his ideas about versification are basically those of the Scotch rhetoricians. His theory that the blank verse line should end with a heavy syllable¹⁴⁷ parallels their dictum that the rules for blank verse and heroic verse are the same, except that he would not have agreed with them that regular cesura is necessary.

Most of Bryant's criticisms show good sense but little daring. Reviewing Dana's *Poems*,¹⁴⁸ he defended his friend's poetic descriptions of passion without liking them. The review of Hillhouse is an intelligent analysis of the problem of the handling of the supernatural in poetry.¹⁴⁹ His first work, the "Essay on American Poetry," contained nothing very

¹⁴⁴ 1825. 1. 39

¹⁴⁵ 1825. 2. 32

¹⁴⁶ See Parke Godwin: *Life and Works of William Cullen Bryant*, six volumes, New York, 1883-1889, see also Tremaine McDowell: *William Cullen Bryant*, N.Y., 1935, for bibliography of critical work.

¹⁴⁷ *North American Review*, 1824. 19. 42

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1828. 26. 239

¹⁴⁹ *New York Review*, 1825. 1. 1

original, and is remarkable chiefly for the fact that he failed to do justice to Freneau's ability.

The "Lectures on Poetry," 1825, were his most original work, though they reveal the influence of Burke, Alison, and Wordsworth. In Lecture I, on the Nature of Poetry, Burke's influence is apparent in the statement that words suggest both the object and the association. But his insistence that poetry is a suggestive art was quite necessary even in that day. So, too, his remarks on the relation between description and the imagination are forceful if not original, and his discussion of the necessity of passion in imagery is a reflection of both the rhetoricians and Wordsworth. Most useful was his differentiation between abstract reasoning and the subtle suggestion of truth in poetry. His remarks on the difference between verse and prose were conventional.

Lecture II, On the Value and Uses of Poetry, reflects Wordsworth in its insistence on the moral usefulness of poetry in society, and the Scots in its cataloguing of poetic subjects. Here there is a long quotation from Channing on analogies between the moral and material worlds. Lecture III concerns Poetry in its Relation to Our Age and Country. Lecture IV, on Originality and Imitation, is an affirmation of the classical principle of building on what has gone before, and of the idea of our necessary cultural relationship with England

Washington Irving (1783-1859)

Irving's attitude toward criticism probably accounts for the paucity of it in his work. He thought neither writer nor reader benefited by it,¹⁵⁰ and believed it inhibited independent judgment. Yet, as reviewer for the *Analectic* in 1813-1814 he said that criticism in this country is important because of the immaturity of public taste. The inconsistency may be explained by the circumstance that Irving was an individualist, but held the average Federalist's patrician attitude toward the people as a whole. It is regrettable that he gave us no

¹⁵⁰ "Desultory Thoughts on Criticism," *Works*, New York, 1905, Vol. XV

more than he did on the subject of the short story (see the chapter on the novel).

Baltimore, the South, and the West

The outlying districts of the country produced little significant criticism within the period. The *Portico* (1816-1818) is interesting chiefly for the survival of Johnsonian principles in its pages. The *Southern Review* (1828-1832)¹⁵¹ reflected something of its editor's—Hugh Swenton Legare—interest in Schlegel and historical criticism, but its excessively long articles were made up almost entirely of excerpt. Nor is there much of importance in either the *Cincinnati Literary Gazette* (1824-1825), the *Western Luminary* (1824-1835), or the *Illinois Monthly Magazine* (1830-1832), which were the principal periodicals of the western area.

¹⁵¹ See W. P. Trent *William Gilmore Simms*, Boston, 1892

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